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FOUR MEN

By the same author
SAILOR TOWN

FOUR MEN

BY
PAUL FOX

LONDON
THE CRESSET PRESS
1947

FOR BENN W. LEVY

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PART I
1918

CHAPTER ONE

THE FOUR YOUNG men, one after another, clambered out of the hatch of the submarine.

Julian Gamble came up first. He was about twenty-two, and on his sleeve was sewn the rating of petty quartermaster. But in spite of the commonplace familiarity of his sailor's uniform, his individuality was clear. He had the ease and assumption of someone who had never known anything but the best. There was an arrogance in his manner so unfeigned as to be not disagreeable. By worldly standards, it was impossible not to accept his high valuation of himself.

His face was extraordinarily handsome, the head beautifully shaped, the hair full of lustre, the intelligent eyes cool and smooth as sea-stones, together with an exactness in the moulding of brow, nose and mouth that suggested the facile perfection of popular illustration rather than flesh itself. And though there was nothing feminine and nothing weak in all his fineness, there was something obscurely empty. He had the irritation of a design without flaws.

He stood upon the narrow deck of the *K-13*, and grasping the detachable hand-rail, sent a long look around sea and sky. All that September day of 1918, it had been raining steadily. But now, toward twilight, the rain had slogged down. It fell only in intermittent bursts as if it were giving up with resentment, like a child turning to thrust its tongue out as it runs.

Everything was washed as by the stroke of a single brush. The world appeared as though seen through an infinitely delicate screen. Against this blank monotone were other things that made variations merely in density: the involved shipping in the harbour of the dirty, New England coast-town; the splotches of oil, fragments of rotten wood, and empty cans that floated on the surface of the water; the bleached piles and grimy warehouses along the shore. The air had a sweet smell.

Young Gamble stared as if lost. The subtlety of range

within the limits of a single hue absorbed his attention. He had a deep, painful longing to hold the visual moment fast, arrest it from change with the desperate defiance of an artist.

He was dimly conscious of a sound of hammering in the interior of the submarine below him, and the shouting of angry voices coming remotely as if from a long way off. Near where he gazed, a hermit gull slipped sideways and sat upon the water with an air of complacency, reflecting upon its own isolation. It opened its beak and emitted a rusty sound with the grave satisfaction of a prima donna. Gamble turned suddenly to find that Alfred Zacharias had now come up and was standing beside him.

Zacharias was about the same age, but wore the visored hat and brass-buttoned jacket of a chief petty officer—a chief machinist's mate. He was not handsome, save, perhaps, by obscure Oriental standards. His features were highly incongruous, the eyes too fine, the nose too coarse. He suggested the contradictions that might be supposed to be discovered in a particular strain of race-horse after it had been subjected to centuries of bad treatment, food no better than offal, and decaying, airless stables.

But his contained, racial face had the attraction that the presence of an alert, energetic, and surface intelligence nearly always supplies. There was a look of smouldering indignation about him, restrained by the Jewish aspect of homely wisdom which is, perhaps, only an indifference for all non-utilitarian aspiration.

He stood beside Gamble without speaking. They did not much care for each other, though each was aware of that cautious respect which is felt for a potential and formidable adversary. They had come up from the experiences of widely dissimilar environments: Zacharias in the most wretched poverty, the son of an East Side New York, Jewish tailor; Gamble in the somewhat theatrical splendour and florid pretences of one of those tremendous personal fortunes made at the end of the nineteenth century—the last era, perhaps,

in which such a fortune could ever be made in the course of a single lifetime.

Zacharias frowned toward the land. His observation, taking in the same things that Gamble regarded, saw them quite otherwise. The chimneys of some huge filthy factories in the distance seemed to him like the spires and symbols of a civilization dedicated to the brutal heightening of inequality. He gazed grimly. He was filled with inarticulate emotions and unassimilated ideas.

As they both briefly and silently waited, the head and shoulders of Will Giles emerged from the hatch in the conning tower.

He was a trifle older than the other two, possibly twenty-five. On his sleeve was the symbol of an electrician. He had the appealing quality which in youth more often proceeds from the lack of good looks than from the possession of them. His small nose was freckled and his eyes were amiable, mild and docile. He had a look of much goodness about him, and the compassion which is the result of a profound experience of care. A struggling medical student before his enlistment, he had had, still back of that, the bitterest sort of childhood in which misery and want had been cruelly provided with the added sensitiveness to absorb their last ounce of pain. He frequently winced, and a desperate look in his unintellectual face seldom ceased to reflect memories that had burned like a branding-iron. They had taught him to ask for little and to be grateful for little.

As he stepped out, he said hopefully to no one in particular: "Quit raining? It'll be fair tomorrow!"

His voice, with a strange undertone of pleading, had that blurred, indescribable accent which rang as clearly as a cash-register the statement of his common upbringing. It suggested, if not bad grammar, at least a kind of uneasiness with educated speech.

Gamble ignored this by exclaiming irritably: "What the hell's keeping Mallory?"

As he spoke, Adam Mallory came up on deck. He was the

youngest of the four sailors, hardly twenty-one. Around the circle of his armpit was the red stripe of an oiler. He had the concerned, puzzled face of someone who was as yet innocent of the world, but was trying very hard to understand.

His was a good-looking enough face, though without the beautiful balance of Gamble's. The light eyes conveyed a seriousness, an intensity, that would have been disagreeable if unaccompanied by intelligence. It was the face of someone to whom conviction was the only thing that mattered. It suggested a searching, uncompromising longing to know.

"Come on," said Gamble impatiently. He grumbled, "What the hell were you doing down there?"

Mallory gave him a faint smile without bothering to answer. They started, all four, across the narrow gangway to the iron dock beside which the *K-13* lay moored. They walked rapidly, as if knowing exactly where they were bound. Their feet struck the pier with the clearness of blows. They were all eager, with the eagerness that obeys the racing blood of first strength, that proceeds from a limitless curiosity, undiminished hope, and the belief that such vitality is inexhaustible.

At the gate the guard examined their passes and waved them by with a grunt. Darkness was beginning to fall on the town. Lights were springing up all along the shore. For Gamble, Zacharias, Giles and Mallory thirty-six hours of freedom lay ahead.

CHAPTER TWO

THEY MADE THEIR way directly to the garage where Julian Gamble kept his car.

This, a Stutz Bearcat, had that suggestion of opulence and beauty possessed by expensive motorcars before automobiles

became as commonplace as egg-beaters. It was open to the sky, topless, and had two cushioned, bucket-like seats in front, and two behind. An impressive dashboard had upon it an extraordinary number of dials, buttons, switches and levers. There were rings set in the floor which, when lifted, allowed two cut-outs to burst into choleric explosions. Then the heavy engine would shake and jar the nearly springless body in a vertigo of passion, and hurl it compactly into space like a lump of tin fired from a cannon.

In this vehicle the four sailors backed out of the murky garage into the street. The thunder of their departure, the shivering ague throughout the car's length, filled them with feelings of pride and magnificence.

They were rumbling down the principal street, spattering mud with a noise of slapping tires. A few passers-by with raincoats still buttoned about their ears glanced up curiously. Some, although the rain had now practically ceased, were fumbling along, lifting needless umbrellas like propitiatory symbols.

The main business street came into view, flanked by middle-class stores whose blurred windows showed displays of cheap shoes, or vividly coloured confectionery, or the confused paraphernalia of druggists' wares. There were several shoddy restaurants, and a picture theatre with coloured posters in front of it under a row of garish lights. It had a repulsive look, like a dirty face that has been painted. On some of the corners were bar-rooms. On the doors of several of these were still pasted the soiled, mimeographed copies of Order No. 108, forbidding the sale of beer or spirits to enlisted men within this zone. Through the windows of the chief hotel, some travelling salesmen, seated in oversized chairs of rust-coloured, imitation leather, could be seen looking out in unimaginative vacancy.

Presently another clump of sailors came down the street on foot; but they were Regulars and they looked up quickly, angrily, and somewhat uneasily. Their faces expressed the resentment of the serious professional for the facetious

amateur, and also the recognition that, though uniformed like themselves, these young men in the expensive car were probably rich, educated, familiar with strange luxuries, and unfairly possessed of enviable gifts, such as the ability to talk easily to beautiful girls and be admired by them in turn.

Now the town began to thin away. Gamble let the car feel its power. In a moment the last houses had disappeared, and they were out in the open countryside, boring a tunnel through the wet, dark air.

Seated beside Gamble, Adam Mallory stared earnestly ahead. His face had an excited look. Behind him, Zacharias, with a tight grip on the door, watched the road warily, suspicious and prepared. Yet his face brooded fathomlessly at the same time, as though he carried always two dissimilar trains of thought. Will Giles, beside him, had his eyes closed and his head thrown back, as if conscious of nothing but the volume of clean wind rushing upon him, enabling him for a little while to feel without thinking. Gamble, hanging on to the wheel, was content to be the master of his exploding cylinders. He did not need either to feel or think, being drugged by action.

But now he shouted suddenly:

"Where's the goddamn crossroad? Harrington said it was only three miles."

"Then you've passed it already," Zacharias, leaning forward, yelled back.

"The hell I have!"

They all peered anxiously into the night. The pinpoints of two advancing headlights appeared abruptly in the distance as if conjured out of the darkness. These grew larger, larger, larger still, and suddenly were on them, aiming at them, it seemed, with intentional directness. But suddenly, with a whisk like the compression of air between two speeding trains, they were by, and the night fell instantly into darkness again.

Gamble all at once swung his car with a lurch into a dirt side-road. This grew rapidly narrower, and then could

be seen only to come to an end before a house standing back among thin, picked trees.

Gamble swore with disappointment. His profanity poured out with a fluency that should have been shocking in contrast to his highly civilized face; but somehow it was not offensive; he seemed not so much to vulgarize himself as to elevate vulgarity, lending it with his well-bred voice a kind of aristocratic flavour.

"You should have taken the South Walton road," said Giles mildly. "That's where we went wrong."

Gamble was backing the car out, twisting his head to try to get a glimpse behind him. He said between his teeth, contemptuously, as if offering to fight about it:

"South Walton, for Christ's sake!"

Giles was silent. Gamble swung into the main road again, and sent the engine into a roar as if this were his own utterance. Half a mile beyond, there was a sweeping bend; here crossroads glistened with wet under the lights of a gas pump.

"Here's the turn-off!" Zacharias shouted needlessly. They swerved to the right again and went thundering past. They were now all watching with an air of serious suspense. Gamble took the next left, gave the car its head, and they went flying and bounding over a rough road for still another mile.

Then all at once, as they jolted without slackening over a railroad crossing, the weak outlines of a settlement could be seen in the dark. The bulk of a huge sandpile made a shadow as mournful as a monument, and near it, in attitudes of death, stood some monstrous roadrollers and cranes. A little beyond, a row of shabby frame houses stood huddled together as if hastily piled up for workmen.

"Here we are!" Gamble shouted triumphantly. He pulled the car up with a jerk of the brake and snapped off his engine.

They jumped out and went around to the back of the nearest house where a dim light was showing. Steps led to

a porch full of old boots, pails, brooms, tools, and littered refuse. Gamble banged at the screen door. After a moment someone came.

"Polak Mike live here?" Gamble demanded, trying to peer into the unlighted passage.

"What do you want?" said a hostile voice in the darkness. The face behind it could not be seen.

"Are you Mike? Harrington sent us."

There was a pause of considering delay. Then the hook of the screen door was flicked up by an immense stubby forefinger, metamorphized without a body as if at a séance. The four sailors trooped inside, went down the passage, and entered a room where a woman and two men, who had evidently been playing cards together, were sitting around a kitchen table that had an oil lamp in the centre. There were the remains of some cheese and bread on a dirty plate. A religious chromo with a caption in a foreign language dangled from a tack on the greasy wall.

The man who had let them in had followed closely. He was short and brutal-looking, with a pocked, unpleasant skin. He had a shrewd air.

"Harrington sent us; told us you'd sell us a bottle," Gamble repeated irritably.

Mike looked at each of them consideringly, then slowly made up his mind.

"I don't do nothing like that. You're sailors."

Gamble became exasperated, but his voice grew wheedling. "Come on, Mike! For God's sake, do we look like the kind that would squeal on you?"

"Maybe not. All the same, you could get drunk—then maybe they ask questions—and then maybe I go to jail."

Zacharias, too, gazed at him with the deepest anxiety; young Mallory's breath was taut.

"Look, we'll pay you more," said Giles. He put his hand in his pocket. "We'll say a stranger gave it to us."

"Nothing will happen to you," said Zacharias soothingly.

"Oh, go on, give the boys a quart," said the woman

suddenly in a husky voice, coupled with a crude laugh. She was middle-aged and wore a wrapper around a figure that sagged like a flour bag. There were gaps of lost teeth in her mouth.

"You shut your face," said Mike savagely. She yawned indifferently, but the opposition seemed to have stiffened his resolve.

"I got nothing for you. And don't send no more around here! I ain't selling no more!"

"O.K., Mike," said Gamble with a sudden peculiar pleasantness. "Any objections to my having a drink of water, at least, before I go?"

"Help yourself," said Mike in a surly tone. "In there."

Gamble went into the kitchen alcove where the sink was. He seemed to be running the water a long time to cool it. At last he came out and said briskly:

"Let's go!"

But Zacharias lingered reluctantly. Gamble exclaimed with irritation: "Come on, don't be a damned fool! You're wasting your time!"

He went down the passage quickly, followed by the others. Outside he reached into his blouse and pulled out a quart of whiskey and showed it to them. Their startled voices made a single discordant sound.

"How'd you get it?"

"How do you think I got it? I knew that's where he'd probably keep anything he had. It was right under the sink all right. And you better get going before he finds out!"

They broke into a run toward the car, all talking at once, their spirits lifted by success, by crime, and the expectancy of danger. Gamble pulled the Stutz around and sped off through the dark. As they went thundering by, Mallory saw Polak Mike come rushing to the door of his shack, holding the lamp over his head, and shouting wildly.

The car roared hotly. In a moment the labourers' settlement was well behind them. But Gamble drove on for

another two miles more before he pulled up in another side-road. He got out and tore the tinfoil from the bottle neck with his thumbnail. But the bottle was tightly corked. Giles dug at this with a tiny penknife, but only frayed the edges. The cork went in deeper.

"Oh, the hell with it!" said Gamble sharply. "Push it on through."

Presently the cork floated on the surface of the liquor. Giles handed it over. Gamble looked around thoughtfully, as if studying the landscape keenly. Then he raised the bottle and gulped. He whipped it away from his mouth with a gagging sound.

"Christ!" he said in a voice of agony. His tone altered completely, yet pretended merely to be a continuance of the ejaculation: "That's smooth!"

He passed it back to Giles. Giles drank also. His face swelled and reddened. Then getting his breath, he said approvingly:

"Great stuff!"

He handed it to Alfred Zacharias, who took only a sip. But Gamble was watching.

"No, you don't!" he cried fiercely. "He's trying to get away with it—welching on us!"

"I take it slowly," Zacharias protested indignantly. "I always do." He had another sip to prove this, and handed the bottle to Mallory.

Mallory's eyes were fixed and staring as though he faced a firing squad. With a feeling of sin, a feeling that in this act he was destroying his own soul, he hastily swallowed a mouthful. Instantly his throat burned and he felt himself strangled, poisoned. Then magically the pain receded, and as it did so, there advanced a faint, indescribable feeling of pleasure. He smiled as though reprieved. Dazedly he returned the bottle to Gamble.

There was an instant's indecision.

"Suppose we head for Boston," said Gamble speculatively. "What do you say? We can finish this up on the way."

"What's the good of going to Boston?" Zacharias demanded.

"Hell, don't you want some girls?"

"We wouldn't get in till after three o'clock. Where are you going to find any girls then?"

"You leave it to me!" said Gamble. But his tone was boastful without being confident. For a moment they all brooded upon their difficulty with the bewildered helplessness of males in a world full of women who ardently desired their desire, yet mysteriously were not anywhere to be met.

"I know a girl in town," said Zacharias in a voice of hesitating admission.

Their heads jumped toward him.

"That last time," he went on. "When we all had leave and I stayed on, I ran into her."

"How old?" Gamble broke in, brushing aside further explanation.

"Twenty-two."

"Got any looks?"

"She's a blonde."

"Will she take a drink?" Gamble's voice was eager.

"I guess so."

But suddenly Gamble's enthusiasm faded. "Christ!" he said. "One girl!"

Giles interposed: "Maybe she has friends. Zach could call her up."

"Sure," said Zacharias.

Gamble accepted this. "All right! We can stay in town tonight and go on to Boston first thing in the morning. Let's have another drink and blow."

The bottle of raw, stolen whiskey circulated hastily again, and they jumped into the car, Zacharias holding the opened bottle carefully on his knees.

Gamble drove back as impatiently as he had driven out. And now, stimulated by the whiskey, stimulated by the violent motion and splendid noise of their approach, and above all by their excited anticipations, they were all talking

at once, laughing loudly, or shouting without waiting for any answer.

In an agreeable tenor Giles began to sing:

*"There are smiles that have a tender meaning
That the eyes of love alone may see
And the smiles that fill my heart with sunshine
Are the smiles that—tum-tum—tum you-give-to-me."*

Against the sound of his voice, Gamble sent out hoots and catcalls that seemed to express nothing but his capital spirits. Now and then he or Zacharias yelled above the general noise obscure allusions that were nevertheless perfectly comprehended by all of them—allusions to their life on board the submarine; to Lieutenant Brale, commander of the *K-13*; to soft-voiced, slippery Ensign Hamilton Dycer; to Chief Torpedoman Schwartz, and others of the crew.

They thought of nearly all these with dislike or hatred, being greatly surprised that war should have given so strange an ascendancy to inferior men. They shouted derisive or abusive comments about them that had lost meaning because of long repetition.

Only Adam Mallory kept silent. But this was because he was too excited to speak. His reflections were as jumbled and chaotic as some faint but ceaseless delirium. They made as yet no pattern of sense, but they enabled him to look back upon his former self with wonder.

Tonight was the most unsettling experience of all. For he had never even tasted spirits before. A sense of profound guilt, coupled with an exultant defiance, struggled in him. The son of a Puritan mother, a woman of great force of character and impressive austerity, he had hitherto lived in a world she had invented for him.

And he was aware, with a sensation of agreeable fear that took his breath away, that he was now, with companions of his own age who possessed no moral scruples at all, in quest of some girls who were expected to be altogether com-

pliant. In this mystery there was terror. They swam before him with allurements too extraordinary to be anything but abstract. Furthermore, this purpose was burned clean of sentiment and tenderness, and held nothing but the pure voluptuousness of appetite.

He lifted his eyes and deeply smiled. He felt in him a power that exceeded ordinary strength. He was dangerous! He was the strongest man in the world!

"By God!" he said softly to himself with awe. "By God!" The Stutz banged on.

CHAPTER THREE

ADAM MALLORY'S FATHER had been a large, florid man, who nearly always had about him a faint reek of excellent Havana cigars, the best Scotch whiskey, and Cordovan leather. He had undertaken to import coffee from South America, and had early begun to prosper. Why he then married Adam's mother—and certainly, why she had married him—was obscure. For marriage was still a stern ideal, not a precarious promise of happiness.

Mrs. Mallory gave substance to such an ideal. She sincerely believed in wickedness that had nothing to do with cruelty, and in virtues that were so often cruel. But she suffered her own restrictions uncomplainingly. And her fastidiousness did not spring from spiritual anaemia, but from the severe covenant she had made with herself to rebuke and withstand the carnality of nature.

The marriage, of course, was a complete failure. Adam grew up in a household where there was scarcely even the relief of hearty quarrelling, but the perpetual feeling of a cold detestation.

The Mallorys lived in Brooklyn, in Mrs. Mallory's old home, an immense and sedate house with innumerable unlit

rooms and airless passages, loaded throughout with cumbrous furnishings.

Jack Mallory was often away on business in Colombia that kept him there for months at a time. Even when he was home, he gave himself frequent holidays, setting up for a sportsman. He hunted and fished, and patronized the races, and could, besides, recite the names, histories, and records of the champions of nearly every major game or sport at a moment's notice.

From his childhood on, Adam's mother had attempted to discourage in him such hearty interests. It was a great wonder that she did not succeed in ruining him in her own way.

As Adam grew older he began to see more plainly the differences between his father and himself. And presently there occurred an incident which set him apart finally, with considerations too shameful even to think about.

One evening, when it was old Annie's night out, and his father was away from home on a presumable duck-hunting expedition, Adam and his mother had gone to New York to pay a social call, and later dined in a restaurant. Mrs. Mallory was so unworldly that she knew nothing at all about such things, and by a comic accident discovered herself in the kind of eating place then known as a lobster palace. There were many tables covered with immense cloths, a faint sound of steam hissing from radiators, the noise of subdued conversations, and the click of knives and tinkle of glasses. Prosperous-looking men, and women who were often beautiful, were all about, indulging in the decorous gaiety of the era.

At this mild spectacle, Mrs. Mallory was quite horrified, and bent her gaze to her plate. But at that moment Adam, who had been staring about with round eyes, exclaimed: "Mother, there's Father!—over there at that table in the corner."

Jack Mallory had with him a female companion whom Adam had certainly never seen before, with a face as pink

as a bon-bon, a spoiled pouting mouth, and great quantities of fashionably-coiffed hair.

Adam instantly knew what it was all about. A profound feeling of shame, or terror, poured through him.

He heard his mother say quickly in a voice that had in it the curtness of a military order:

"Pay no attention!"

He was aware—and remembered it afterward—that the admirable woman in the strength of her pride did not even allow herself the feminine luxury of observing who had temporarily supplanted her. She never once looked up.

They had nothing but a couple of glasses of milk, and escaped quickly. They were both silent on the way home. But once Adam's mother, who forbade herself ordinarily even the joy of demonstrativeness, took his hand and held on to it fiercely, as though assuring him of security. He felt he loved her then very much, and in his sorrow for her he was able to forget his own shamefaced misery.

It was not long after this that the last pretences of family life in the Mallory household were blown away. Jack Mallory took to living at a club as often as not when he was in town. He paid occasional visits to his home, the only purpose of which seemed to be the utterance of lofty sarcasms that he had stored up in the interval, that did not spare either his son or his wife.

And one night Adam had waked up at a sound of low voices that nevertheless carried the vibrations of an unsettling intensity. Curiosity rapidly drove his nerves to a pitch. He got up and, trembling unaccountably, stole barefooted down the dark corridor toward his mother's room. He was not astonished to hear issuing from there his father's voice with its disagreeable, bullying note.

Nevertheless, it was so low that no actual words could be distinguished. But the intonations were enough. The narrow yet subtle range of sounds made each emotional significance perfectly plain. There would be the rumbling tone of his father's anger, heightened by a controlled tightness which

thus said it was so angry that it needed to be controlled. Then would come the thin clarity of Mrs. Mallory's detached voice, held on a plane of such unnatural evenness as to state her infinite withdrawal. The two voices would rise and fall in an almost mathematical relationship, combine in a climax, and then drop into a silence of breathing deliberation only to burst out presently all over again.

Once or twice a laugh from one, that was not a laugh, but a furious insult, broke in two a sentence of the other. Then the mood lifting, swelling, trembling like a wave, would hurl itself downward into a crash of accusations.

And after the longest pause of all, in which thoughts themselves seemed to quiver like antennae in the darkness, the voices, rising upon still another note, told Adam that they now had reference to him. An instinct of alarm rose in him. In panic, with hands needlessly pressed upon his ears, he fled, his thin boy's legs protruding like stalks from the cylinder of a flannel nightgown.

Sometime later from his own room he heard his father leave. A door banged below and silence rose through the house like a wind, in its definiteness no mere absence of sound, but a thing like sound itself. The boy fell asleep. He never saw his father again.

Mrs. Mallory did not mention her husband after that, except once. Then more than a year later, with the air of discharging a formal duty, she told Adam quietly one morning that down in Colombia his father was dead. Adam did not know what he was supposed to say or even to feel. But he was conscious of the most unexpected pang. It was as if he had not really hated his father at all. But immediately, before he could say anything, his mother had changed the subject, as though asserting that this was a barrier between them that must never be crossed, and concerning which they must keep their thoughts to themselves.

They had hitherto been comfortably off, and now they were better. But Mrs. Mallory despised all display, all waste,

as either vulgar, or worse still, self-indulgent. Big as the house was, there were only two servants to run it: old Annie, who had come there as Adam's nurse and been graduated to cook, and Doris, whose pale eyes had eternally the horror-struck expression of someone who had just seen a ghost the moment before—a ghost, perhaps, exactly like herself, as white and thin and horror-struck. But both of the girls were very religious. Naturally Mrs. Mallory had first made sure of that.

Everyone rose early and had a hearty, plain breakfast. Then Mrs. Mallory taught Adam his lessons, for she had determined to take over his education herself as long as it was possible.

But the household revolved principally around a fixed succession of small religious ceremonials. There were long prayers before each meal, long prayers after them. Adam had to say on each occasion a Bible text.

Very early Adam compliantly accepted the intimation that a Calvinistic theology was to be more than a philosophy for him; it was to be a career. His mother had the highest estimation of all workers in the foreign missionary fields. She did her best to introduce their struggles in the most favourable light. Adam took it for granted that he himself some day would be a missionary in remote China, or far-off India.

Other children with whom he played did not in the least know what he meant by his talk of becoming a missionary, or grasp his strange, lustful vision of the bloodiest martyr's death in some faraway land, followed by an enraptured recital of it before an audience that rose cheering to its feet. Death on such occasions, of course, was simply a picturesque moment, after which one miraculously recovered and had other adventures and more applause.

An upbringing which thus severely settled out of hand every question that could be posed might have been expected to leave Adam's mind sterile. But he was imaginative and discovered for himself things that had the greater satisfaction

of not being answerable. As he was lonely, he had early invented strange games for himself.

As a small boy, he would lay out the face cards from a pack of his father's, which for some reason Mrs. Mallory had not happened to throw away. Standing over the Kings and Queens and Knaves with a stick in his hand, he would lead them like an imaginary orchestra. He could do this for hours with the astonishing persistence of a child, and it was all the stranger because he had never really seen an orchestra, nor did he in the least care for music, good or bad.

Notwithstanding the gloomy prayers that ascended night and day through the old, dim house, the oppressive Sundays, and the perverse attitude that found satisfaction in hopelessness and pain, Adam managed to store up many cheerful and tender memories. Now and then he was given formal, educational outings, such as a sail on an excursion boat up the Hudson, with a lunch of sandwiches, peaches and cookies, never tasting half so good before, all wrapped in waxed paper in an old shoe box. There were hot Summer days when he turned the icecream freezer in the kitchen for Annie, and was given the dasher to lick as a reward; and Winter evenings when, after a bath, he was sometimes allowed to roll himself up in a blanket before the hearth, and watch the fire with lulled, exquisite sensations.

And by now he had begun to speculate for himself upon the mysteries of the universe. He tried to conceive of nothingness. All the stars in the sky were enclosed in a great square box of air and light. But, if so, what was outside of that? Not just blackness, because that, too, was *something*. But suppose they went on forever and forever, and there was no end, there was no square, comfortable container to limit them at all! His mind staggered as it tried to grasp either conception.

Adam was growing taller, growing out of all balance, with knowledges and ignorances as wildly irregular as the peaks and declivities of a mountain range. It was clear that he required something beyond his mother's elementary teaching.

Mrs. Mallory, whose hope of justification it was to offer her uncorrupted son to the cause of Man, feared the effect of schools upon him. She would lose him, but that she could bear. She could not bear that her conception of virtue should lose him, too.

There must be something else, she anxiously assured herself, some way in which he could be guarded a little longer until he should become so crystallized in similarity to her as to be safe. It was in this way it came about that Cousin Daniel arrived to live with them and be Adam's tutor.

Cousin Daniel was not really Mrs. Mallory's cousin at all; at best, only a distant connection. But a common blood strain, which so often produces an entire race of mathematicians, say, or soldiers, had contrived to produce in him a missionary.

Long years ago he had gone forth with a small energetic wife, not to the India or China of Adam's imaginings, but to an equally recondite Africa. He was an old man now, retired from his work, and grown somewhat eccentric. He was very tall, with eyes of a cloudy, indefinite colour that peered at everything with intentness, but with no more awareness than the lens of a camera.

Adam always remembered the morning the tall man in the black broadcloth suit that hung on him like a sack came fumbling into the room, and fastened his big, unwary eyes on him.

"This is Cousin Daniel, Adam."

Adam stared hard, and rather indignantly. Cousin Daniel did not in the least fit in with his conception of martyr adventurers, facing torture with uplifted throat and still-exulting eyes. Cousin Daniel stared back with a vacant look. And indeed, as teachers of the young gradually with time come to imagine the world entirely populated by schoolboys, while physicians cannot help but suppose it to be inhabited solely by invalids, Cousin Daniel gazed upon Adam with the same puzzled apathy he had shown toward his ebony parishioners.

Adam instantly decided that Cousin Daniel was a fool. Nor did he think better of him in the few days that followed. Cousin Daniel had no exciting stories to tell of his long curacy among the fierce Masai. He was unable to recall the beasts and the dangers of that exotic wilderness. He obligingly said a few words in the trade language, Swahili, but this gift, on repetition, soon lost interest. And Adam was offended by the feeling that even after a week his tutor still did not know what he looked like, and would have passed him on the street without recognition.

Then unexpectedly Cousin Daniel revealed a facet that nearly compensated for everything. There arrived at the house almost a dozen big, worn hampers and trunks. These, when opened, proved to be full of shells. Like many who seek to fill a vacuum, Cousin Daniel was a collector. And since the difficulties of acquirement merely increase the collector's illusion of an achievement of something solid, something important, the tremendous obstacles that Cousin Daniel had faced in his specialization had even been welcome to him.

There, in the interior of his dark continent, cut off, marooned, nearly unreachable, he had nevertheless, by the exercise of the most exhausting patience and the most illimitable persistence, amassed seashells from almost every coast in the world.

Now before Adam's wide eyes Cousin Daniel began to set out his trophies with reverent care. He had come home, he said solemnly, to put them in order.

They showed nearly every delicate gradation of tint, and ran in size from minute forms no bigger than a lentil to convoluted monsters as large as trumpets. Some of the rare sorts had their own glass cases; others rested back upon small especially-shaped blocks of wood, or reclined in velvet-lined boxes. Each had affixed to it a sticker with its names, both popular and scientific, its habitat, and the date when Cousin Daniel had acquired it.

As his hands moved among them, Cousin Daniel's usually

awkward fingers became precise and nimble. Occasionally he would tell Adam the formidable name of a specimen: the *cardita bicolor*, a small shell from Ceylon that was fragile with delicacy, and marked like a cat with pale brown stripes; the *cassis rufa*, a bright red cameo shell from Zanzibar; the *voluta hebraea*, a conch from West Africa, its angular planes picked out with a design like a musical score. His voice, as he pronounced these names, grew quite lively, and an active light glowed in his eyes; here at last was something in which he had been able to believe.

It was, perhaps, due to Cousin Daniel's passion for conchology that Adam's sketchy and ill-balanced education could later be ascribed. He had, of course, been made to feel that a more serious era was opening. Parcels of textbooks arrived that conveyed a staleness exactly like the staleness of old cake. A routine was then formulated with set periods for study and for recitation.

While his thoughts wandered drowsily, as he sat in the corner of the library with one of these offensive volumes on his knees, Adam would gaze over at Cousin Daniel, mumbling with deep contentment, hovering over his shells with the air of a mother bending over a cradle, affixing new labels to them with frowns of care, slowly and luxuriously examining some recent acquisition, and halting now and then to make notes in his copious catalogues.

It was easy to cheat under these circumstances. For often Cousin Daniel completely forgot to quiz him, and when he did remember, and turned away with a sigh from the contemplation of his actual lifework, he could be diverted by the merest reference to some shell or other. Then Adam would sit calmly, questioned no further, while Cousin Daniel expounded with great force the history and characteristics of that particular shell and what was most to be looked for in it.

So Adam was bored, and his boredom led him insensibly into the habit of reading other books than those provided for his advancement. The house was stocked with a large

library of standard works purchased by Jack Mallory, and left with the pages all uncut, together with the scatterings and chance accumulations of other vanished members of the family.

Adam began to read, with a complete indifference as to selection, gobbling up everything in a kind of lust for repletion. He ran through dusty piles of old magazines like someone riffling through a pack of cards. He read with equal pleasure children's books and books he could not possibly have been expected to understand. But this did not prevent him from arguing with their authors. While the old man in the dim library muttered with child-like happiness as he played with his shells, the actual child in the corner, his eyes racing down a page, would now and then pause to scribble a scornful denial on its margin. He fought fierce battles with dead men, who, if they could for a moment have lived again, and seen him thus, might well have smiled and humbly asked forgiveness.

He had a longing to know the reason for everything. There had been born in him a ceaseless, gnawing passion for the truth—a temperament as fanatic as his mother's, that could not, however, be satisfied by the formal answer that had contented her.

And with the beginning of his habit of omnivorous reading, the clarity of childhood was at an end. From now on all things would be made unintelligible by the clashing attitudes, discordant credos, and downright mendacities that present themselves as the sole, the inviolable, truth. For what he would henceforth acquire, he must pay the price of uncertainty.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEN FIVE YEARS had gone by in an absorption of inconsequential happenings. At eighteen Adam was tall, fair, and

somewhat bony. His body had a rather delicate, almost frail look. And this seemed the more strongly marked because of his abundant, flowing vitality. His flexible mouth was altogether good-humoured, and his light eyes were trustful. He seemed like the usual highstrung, intelligent young man except that there was something arresting about his searching, abstracted expression. You would have said he was absent-minded.

That Autumn he went away to college. His mother must have supposed him safe from the corruptions of heresy at last. In reality, he was for the first time really exposed to the danger of tolerance.

His nearly solitary, tutored youth had rendered him an odd fish in the ordinary activities of most ordinary young men. Still he had been alone so long that he did not particularly notice now that he was an outcast. Yet he was not actually disliked. With time his inoffensive differences even became rather pleasantly familiar to his fellows, like a landmark whose characteristics remain reassuringly unchanged.

At the beginning of each school year he was greeted often quite warmly, and thereafter dropped with good-natured indifference as if he were something inanimate. His habits, becoming well known, were accepted with derisive affection. He was, for instance, seldom to be seen without a book, yet these had often no connection with his courses.

He had been observed calmly reading something that interested him, through an entire lecture about something that did not. A classmate coming on him, perhaps, as he moved gravely across the campus, his eyes bent upon the ground and a volume tucked beneath his arm, would occasionally halt to peer at what he carried.

"Good God! Schopenhauer!" the other undergraduate might exclaim with horror.

For Adam was now reading more widely and eagerly than ever in the touching belief that he would thus be able to fortify his theological convictions. He had decided it was necessary to hear the other side and dispose of it, to dispel

the vague uneasiness that with maturity had somewhat unsettlingly begun to steal over him. Alas, it was the other side that disposed of him! A number of old, forgotten criticisms that did not matter to anyone any more, those once sardonic but now toothless disclosures, had their brief return to fiery existence in him, and with horror, yet with a delighted excitement, Adam beheld his religion fall utterly to pieces.

He was saved!—saved in the real sense, he grimly assured himself. He did not believe in anything! How wonderful that was! Furthermore, his conduct was suddenly his own property, and not at the mercy any longer of idiotic taboos. He began to wonder whether in his past bigotry he had not been unjust to his father's memory. He himself determined to embrace the virile satisfactions of a man of the world.

It only remained to inform his mother that now he could no longer consider becoming missionary, clergyman, or any similar thing. That was not going to be easy, even for a man of the world. He did not want to shatter her, of course. Yet was not the duty he owed to severe truth higher even than the solicitude he owed to her?

The amateur man of the world went home in the Easter holidays determined to break the news of his apostasy as gently—perhaps as suavely—as possible. But somehow, once he had arrived, he kept uneasily putting it off. He decided to wait until just before leaving.

Killing time with this decision settled, he went one evening on a solitary visit to a movie. In the lobby of the pretentiously lush theatre some canaries twittered in cages, and the air was filled with a perfumed spray. Footfalls vibrated soundlessly on the soft carpets, and the peal of an organ suggested the proceedings of some religious rite.

Adam sat well down in front. He had watched the picture for nearly twenty minutes before he became aware of a girl who, like himself, was alone, in the seat beside him. She laughed with a low, confiding sound at the humorous moments, and her laughter seemed subtly to invite Mallory

to share in this amusement. She appeared to suggest that, since they were enjoying the same thing, they were automatically there together. He looked at her furtively, afraid that she would see him looking, but his male slowness of observation kept him from discovering much about her.

However, he no longer noticed the movie, though he stared at it fixedly. He was thinking confusedly about his companion. He felt that she wanted him to talk to her. But suppose she didn't! And then what was he expected to say?

The spool of film unrolled to its conclusion and began to retrace its course. Adam was suddenly aware that he had seen this part before. He sat on stupidly, hearing from the girl occasional faint murmurs, or indefinite sounds that formed no words yet nevertheless suggested a conversation. He felt hypnotized, as by an unbearable paralysis. He made an effort and got to his feet. He saw her rise also, yet perfectly at ease, without hurry or self-consciousness. He felt himself flushing as they reached the lobby almost together.

"Good, wasn't it?" she said, as if she were merely saying good-bye with the simplest friendliness.

He mumbled an answer, and the next moment found himself walking by her side. She had made it natural for him to do that. And there was an air of casual, good-humoured indifference about her that lulled him. She asked him some languid questions about himself, but seemed not to hear the answers, or at any rate not to be much interested. Presently she volunteered the information that she was a model.

The word reacted powerfully on him. It possessed exciting connotations of nudity. He glanced at her swiftly and saw that she was altogether pretty, though he could not have described a single feature. He supposed she was probably a year or two older than he was.

They came to a row of old brownstone houses near the river, houses that had fallen from their original social station to the tawdry renting of rooms.

"Here's where I live," she said. She smiled. "Perhaps we'll meet again. I go to the movies there quite often."

"Yes—I hope so," Adam stammered.

"About eight o'clock I'm usually in," she added, as if he had asked her about this. He envied her extraordinary calm, and was stimulated by the incredible suspicion that she was interested in him.

"I'll stop by some night soon if you'd like," he said suddenly, wondering how the words came to him.

She appeared to be quite satisfied by this and told him her name was Laura Green. She held out her hand and smiled again.

"Good-night."

For nearly a week he did nothing about it, but he thought about her almost constantly. He was tormented by curiosity, and to satisfy it invented a complete history for her. He wondered whether he had merely imagined her interest in him. Possibly she had forgotten all about him by now.

Then one night he found himself walking past the house where she lived. He turned and retraced his steps. He passed the house again with a feeling of the greatest shame at his cowardice. Suddenly he made up his mind and clenched his teeth. He ran up the steps, fearing his resolve would fail him if he so much as paused. But before he could ring the bell, he almost collided with her as she came out. She was with another man. He was much older—thirty-five, maybe even forty! Adam hated him. How dare a man as old as that inflict himself on a young girl? There was something brutal and sensual in the thought. But as he stood staring wretchedly, she took control of things with admirable ease.

"Oh, hello there! Were you coming to see me? I'm sorry—I'm going out tonight. But tomorrow—I'm not doing anything tomorrow afternoon."

Tomorrow would be Saturday. It was Adam's last day of vacation. On Sunday he would have to return to college. He went slowly homeward with a mixture of elation and a feeling of painful awkwardness. But he felt he had nothing

to wait for, or to live for, except tomorrow. He slept badly, and spent the next morning watching the clock. He shaved unnecessarily, for the second time, after lunch in the old Brooklyn house in which he and his mother and Cousin Daniel lived, and cut himself in several places.

He went out and knew he was far too early. He walked around the block at Columbia Heights, with nerves so tightened that his breath left him, and he began to feel exhausted. He rang the bell at last. A landlady with the straggling hair and soiled kimono of her kind let him in, and said she would fetch his friend.

Laura Green was a long time. At last she came down in her slow, assured way, and Adam instantly felt glad he was here. Yet she had for him no personality, no definiteness. She merely personified sexual difference. She fascinated him because of this alone. It was as if she were the only woman who had ever lived, and he had discovered her.

Up to this time he had had no plans for her entertainment, but she solved this by asking him if he wouldn't like to go to Coney Island. It was still cold and deserted there at this time of year, of course, but there were already a few places open, and there was always the sea. It would be fun—or didn't he think so?—to do something different.

Adam had a happy afternoon. They walked along the empty beach until it grew too chilly. Then they found an amusement place that had opened as if in an effort to encourage the procrastinating Summer. There were simple games to play. He had never done this sort of thing before and he enjoyed himself because of her enjoyment. And yet he had the odd feeling that most of her pleasure was only pretence, a determination to get the most out of the expedition by heightening its least opportunity for gaiety. He admired her more and more. He grew more and more curious about her. This was increased because she told him very little. He did not even know where she came from, or in what her modelling work consisted.

They were tired and hungry when they went to the huge,

nearly empty restaurant that was only partially open. They ate with gusto. Adam laughed often without knowing why he laughed. Afterwards they went to see another movie, not far down the street. It was warm and quiet inside, as they followed with proper emotions an excessively sentimental story. It was late when they came out, and the elevated train seemed to take hours to get them home. When they reached her street, it was mournful with emptiness. Not a soul was to be seen. A sharp wind was crying up and down in the lonely dark. They had ceased talking for some time. Talking was now not necessary.

She reached into her bag and found a small key. He opened the door for her, and returned the key. He was about to thank her for the pleasant day in a speech which he had spent some time and effort in composing on the trip home, when she entered the vestibule softly. Then she turned and looked at him.

He could see her face there, all in shadow, the dark hair agreeably disturbed by the wind of their outing, her eyes full of provocative lights. Suddenly she put her finger against her lip, cautioning him to silence, and turned to go up the stairs, leaving the door open behind her.

Adam's heart gave a great leap that had the exact impact of a blow. He stared, terrified. The stern teachings in which he had been brought up, the vision of the universe as a bitter struggle between merely moral forces, chained him fast. His mouth felt dry. He longed, desperately longed, to follow her, and as he did so, the man of the world found himself shutting the door instead, and running down the steps in panic.

The next morning directly following breakfast, after a night in which he had slept badly, Adam rather fiercely informed his mother how he had changed.

"I've been thinking this over. It's time I told you. I can't ever be a missionary—I don't believe in such things any more."

The few blurted words seemed incongruously feeble to be

an expression of all the effort he had gone through to be able to utter them. He was not sure from his mother's silence that she had even understood him. He looked up at the clock, ticking in the dark, heavy room, as if expecting that that might answer him, then stared away at the glints of the polished mahogany, and down at the thick Oriental rugs that seemed to absorb thoughts like sounds.

After a time she said in a measured way: "If you do not feel you must, Adam, there is nothing more to be said."

She paused, showing nothing in her face of what must have filled her with panic and emptiness. After a moment she asked:

"The point is, what *are* you going to do?"

"I haven't any idea," said Adam.

He need not have worried, if he had known, nor his mother either. For the war was coming on smoothly, and before that next Summer was over he went down the steps of the old house one afternoon, pale and excited, to a waiting cab. His mother stood watching him from the doorway. She was actually holding a small silk flag. Behind her in the gloom, Adam could discern the faces of old Annie, red-eyed from sniffing, and Doris with her mouth wide open under the impulsion of the heavy breathing demanded by the occasion. Just then Cousin Daniel burst through, and came hurrying down after him with the clacking steps of a marionette, holding a minute shell.

"My dear boy, take this—there are only three others like it in the world, you know!"

And so with Cousin Daniel's shell in his pocket, young Adam went off to war.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE STEAMER THAT was to take Adam up the Sound to his destination of a naval station left New York at twilight. It was crowded; and it seethed with the kind of activity that

had been released by the war in which a great many people were on their way to strange places or undertaking new occupations.

There were a number of sailors on board, returning from leave to the station to which Adam, after his enlistment, had been assigned. Some of them swaggered vigorously through the saloons in noisy gangs, laughing uproariously or catcalling in the hopes of attracting attention to themselves. They were proud of being young, proud of now having a popular identity, proud of everything.

Others sat moodily by themselves with sullen or baffled expressions. But it was strange that their interchangeable uniform, that should have reduced them to a dead-level parity, did nothing of the sort. Instead, it was easy to see at a glance which ones had experienced the roughest kind of environment, and which ones a solicitous upbringing. There was something mysterious about this deduction, for what were the tell-tale signs? They were certainly not connected with fine looks or coarse features, or the aspects of intelligence or of dullness, for these qualities, too, were interchangeable in both orders. Yet all these members of a community founded upon the hypothesis of equality knew instantly, without seeking to act upon it, or even admit it to themselves, this principal fact about one another, as if they had been so many caste-marked Hindus.

So packed was the boat that there were not enough staterooms to go around, and Adam, standing in line before the purser's window, heard him call out that it would be necessary for two or more to share each of the few cabins that remained. A young man, just in front of Adam, turned, looked him over quickly, and asked with a smile:

"Want to bunk in with me? I'll get one for the two of us."

Adam said that would be fine, and presently they were given a key, and went off in search of their quarters. Adam started to carry his own bag, but the stranger, though his suitcase appeared to be light, at once summoned a porter to help them, as if this were an obligatory essential.

The cabin was a small inside one, containing two berths that took up most of the space, a washstand, and a stool. Adam's companion said he thought he would shave, and began to lay out his things. Adam perched himself on the edge of the lower berth and watched him.

They had ascertained directly that they were both on the same mission, and had felt an immediate bond. The stranger said his name was Will Giles. Though he was only a few years older than Adam, an experienced air made him appear immensely more mature. But his blunt face with its blue eyes and snub nose was pleasing, and full of the greatest docility. He seemed to be trying to overcome this suggestion with a kind of forced briskness, but whenever he spoke there was a hesitating breath under his tone, like the agitated, barely controllable sound of someone who longs only for reassurance.

While he now stood in his undershirt, lathering his face as thick as a pie, he asked Adam a few questions about himself, learning that he had left college to come to war.

Opening his mouth like a crater in the lather that now covered it, Giles said he was a medical student himself. He then added abruptly, bringing out the words very clearly: "I began life as a newsboy."

This statement seemed to Adam to be somewhat unconnected. It even sounded guilty, like the defiant declaration of a bad trait before someone else can pronounce it. Adam did not know what he was supposed to answer, so he said vaguely, "Is that so?" and went on to ask Giles why with his experience he hadn't joined some medical corps instead.

"As a hospital orderly?" Giles exclaimed scornfully. Adam looked at him wonderingly, seeing that he looked upon such an idea as an intolerable insult to his dignity. He did not clearly understand Giles' feelings and, changing the subject, asked him what he thought was going to happen to them.

Giles held his razor in mid-air for a moment and looked over at Adam with a smile that was rather paternal. It was plain that he thought Adam very green, but did not dislike

him for this. On the contrary, his voice became more easy and natural, and he began to offer a great deal of advice that was both meagre and ignorant, and only indicated that he himself was equally unclear about the future.

"You won't have any trouble," he asserted. "I'll give you a hand anyways. My upbringing was probably a lot different than yours. I'll show you how to manage these babies. Now, in the first place, if they ask you——"

He flourished the razor and went on talking.

They went down together presently to the big dining saloon, while the creaking steamer rolled like a fat old lady on the swelling Sound water. Giles had an air of taking charge now. It was clear that he had made up his mind that he liked Adam and had decided to protect him.

At the end of the meal which, in spite of Adam's attempts to forestall him, Giles insisted almost angrily on paying for, an incident occurred which prepossessed Adam in Giles' favour, too. The coloured steward returned with a salver of change which was fifty cents short. Adam, calculating this almost unconsciously after the steward had left with a generous tip in addition to what he had bagged, exclaimed indignantly:

"Look here! That fellow just cheated you——"

Then he suddenly saw that Giles knew, too; had known all along, though he had done nothing about it.

"Oh, it doesn't matter; poor devil probably needs it." His voice trailed off in a mumble. "What's the use——"

He looked a little flustered and uncomfortable, and seemed anxious to drop the topic.

"But if you don't stop him, he'll do it again to someone else," Adam protested.

"He probably will anyway. Besides, what difference does it make? When you've been around as much as I have—Oh, what the hell, forget it! Now look, I was telling you——"

Adam stared at him with warm regard. He felt that Giles was wonderfully benevolent. Indeed, there was that sad, forgiving look in his eyes like the compassionate look in the eyes of a good dog.

They went up on deck shortly and faced the sharp sweet wind through which the vessel's nose drove in the blackness. The lights on the shore could scarcely be seen now. Giles lit a pipe, and this, whipped by the breeze, glowed hot and active. But the air soon made them sleepy and they returned to their cabin.

Giles said wearily that the war was especially hard on him, for he had had only one more year before his internship, and he was, besides, the sole support of his mother. His father had died when he was a boy, and he had been brought up alone by her. Adam said hastily that was what had happened to him, too.

"Yes, but I don't suppose you know what it means to go without anything to eat sometimes," Giles said with a cheerful laugh. Then he threw his suitcase into the less comfortable upper bunk, which he insisted with determination on taking himself.

Lying in his berth, Adam thought what a fortunate thing it was that they had met. He made up his mind to make a close friend of Giles. And indeed, during their next few weeks in the barracks of the naval station, they became inseparable. Adam's bewildered adjustments to nearly his first actual experience of life were alleviated by Giles' friendship.

But as time went on, Adam began to notice something which at first had not even caught his attention: Giles' peculiar muddiness of accent, and his frequent mistakes in grammar. Reluctantly, it also dawned on him that the medical student was more sensitive than intelligent.

Giles seemed upset by their inactivity. He demanded frequently to know why he had ever joined a service like this one. The whole thing was a fake! They were sailors and there were no boats for them. They were more protected than if they had remained at home. The idea rapidly became an obsession with him. He seemed to have the notion that at the sight of his uniform passers-by looked at him with derision.

"Hell, you can't rush up and tell them it isn't your fault you're acting like a slacker!" he would exclaim. "How was we to know?"

And now and then he would brood over the difficulty of facing a future inquiry into his conduct.

"Imagine your grandchild saying, 'What did you do in the great war, Grandpa?' And you having to answer, 'I was in the Naval Reserve Force!'"

Adam could not understand why this lack of heroic opportunity should bother him so much, nor why he was so concerned about the opinions of his potential grandchildren.

It is often the same qualities that at first attracted us in others which, after familiarity, are the ones that seem most irritating. Giles' affectionately protective manner finally drove Adam into resentment.

One day, when the Winter was almost gone, Adam came out of the camp gates on liberty to find Giles already waiting for him there as usual. Suddenly without knowing that he was going to do so, he burst out, "Can't you find anyone to hang around with except me? Why don't you do something by yourself for once?"

The words, which summed up much previously unspoken irritation, had the crack of abruptness. Giles turned quite pale and seemed unable to answer. Adam wandered off alone, drank a cup of coffee in a restaurant, took a familiar walk along the waterfront, and grew more and more regretful. Why had he spoken to poor Giles like that? Giles had done nothing.

But when he returned to the barracks, and saw Giles look at him so humbly, he grew angry all over again. For the next three days they managed to avoid each other. But on the third evening, Giles came over to Adam's cot, where he had been sitting writing a dull, dutiful letter home.

"Look here, I know how you feel and everything, but I want to say good-bye, anyway."

"Good-bye?"

Giles nodded, pursing his lips very seriously. "I've applied for transfer to submarine service—like it said on that last bulletin they posted. They're going to take me, I guess. I couldn't stand it here much more anyway. So—well, anyway, I thought I'd say good-bye."

"Submarine service?" Adam slowly repeated. All at once it seemed to him he felt just as Giles did: he could not stand another minute of this tedious emptiness.

His fountain pen slipped from his fingers and rolled along the floor. He stooped and retrieved it from beneath the cot, and when he came up with a flushed face, his mind was made up.

"I'll go with you," he said.

Giles made a shocked gesture.

"Are you crazy? Do you want to be killed?"

"What are *you* doing it for then?"

"Me? Oh, I'm all right. I can take care of myself. But you don't know what a submarine is like. And anyway, you haven't got the qualifications."

"I can make them take me if I want it enough," said Adam grimly. "Besides, you can help me, can't you?"

Giles looked at him with swimming blue eyes. For a horrible moment, Adam was afraid he was actually going to cry. He could see that poor Giles was deeply flattered by a misconception. It was certain he imagined Adam was only trying to mend matters and apologize to him in this dramatic manner.

The faint catching of breath now mingled with his tone, together with the quiver of a suppressed laugh.

"I guess I can look out for you, all right! We'll have a great time together. Let's shake on it!"

They exchanged the solemn handclasp of young men. Adam could not bear wounding Giles a second time by stating his real motives. He felt a pity for him in which there was now no longer any trace of his first admiration.

CHAPTER SIX

FROM THE INCIDENT of that handshake to this moment as they now rocked along through a scud of slime in Julian Gamble's expensive car, it seemed a great reach of time.

Adam Mallory, with his head spinning from the green whiskey he had taken, with excitement, alarm and expectancy, looked out from the underslung body upon the dark land rushing past, as he might have peered above the rim of a bathtub that had suddenly become a projectile. He was confounded by the realization that it was only six months—not even that—since he and Will Giles had joined the crew of the *K-13*. He had the familiar sensation of astonishment at pausing in the midst of an era and noting the rapidity of the changes which marked its breathless passing.

And yet Adam could not say exactly what had happened, only that he felt different, thought differently, and surely was different!

It had been a fine Spring day when he and Giles had reported for duty at the submarine base. His own application for transfer had miraculously gone through without a hitch; but both of them had had misgivings once the fact was accomplished.

Adam's first sight of the submarine had filled him with those disquieting sensations usually associated with a blow in the stomach. With its narrow deck all but awash, and the plates of its hull disappearing in sinuous arcs into the dirty harbour water beneath, it suggested obviously and exactly the form of a monstrous shark. The conning tower made a clumsy dorsal fin, and the shining, wet flanks had precisely the slippery glaze of a fish.

They had descended gingerly through a hatch like a man-hole, and found that the belly of this creature was crammed with the most ingenious and conglomerate mechanisms possible. In the central station was a vast amount of control apparatus for the function of submerging and locomotion, for the pumping of tanks, the closing of bulkheads, the

firing of torpedoes, and the directing of tremendous air pressures. Caged bulbs glared violently in a gleaming whiteness that ached the eyes. Everywhere, valves, vents and conduits, compasses, Kingston levers, and interstation telephones were tucked away into the last available inch of space above a deck that was an unbroken series of trapdoors. This bursting yet methodical array of instruments seemed twisted together in a mathematical design as by the caprice of a lunatic.

As Adam, close behind Giles, threaded his way cautiously forward through a narrow aisle past an assemblage of wheels, levers, lights, dials, and switches, he had the air of a bewildered insect wandering forlornly inside the works of a clock.

Ahead of them in this fantastic capsule were other sections—compartments for torpedoes, for the batteries of the underwater engine power, a diminutive chart-room and mess-room, a galley, the space for the folding bunks of the crew, and the compact cells that were the officers' quarters.

As they moved on, they saw in a blur suddenly lifted, staring faces; heard indolent voices coming from all about with a hollow resonance, or were brushed by others who were passing through on their way to some duty or other.

In the principal cabin, Lieutenant Brale, commander of the *K-13*, lay back in a steel swivel chair in front of a kind of built-in bureau-desk that had upon it some filed orders and a copy of Jane's *Fighting Ships*. A well-dirtied seagoing cap was slapped on the side of his head, and close at hand was a half-finished highball and a phonograph whose unchanged needle added a wheezing accompaniment to a popular tune.

Brale stared at the two new arrivals from dark eyes that had the ferocious expressionlessness of a beetle. He seemed not in the least concerned to know anything about them, but only to make it felt immediately by them that he was an autocrat, that his power was limitless, and that the only thing that mattered, or could ever matter, was what he wanted. There was something comforting about an assurance

so untroubled. Its egotistic brutality was full of sanity and health.

He spoke briefly and contemptuously as though to show the gulf he seemed perfectly certain existed between them, and sent them off with an air of kicking them out. Giles and Adam fumbled their way to their appointed bunks and began to stow away their equipment.

They had a somewhat crushed look, each reflecting in silence upon this unsettling trap in which they had witlessly caught themselves. Some others of the crew were leaning about nearby, or dozing in their bunks off watch. The large majority of them were obviously regular Navy men, having an illiterate, good-naturedly crude appearance, together with that hint of childish irresponsibility which was the mark of their protected and dependent existence. As Giles and Adam with serious expressions put away their things, the others asked them a few questions, or exchanged talk among themselves in a simple language of obscenity that was, nevertheless, flexible enough for all necessary communications. Thus, the statement of any demand or opinion seemed nearly always to be restricted to a single word, which was then pronounced in an enclosure of irrelevant filth as cheerful as a swallow on a dunghill.

The two newcomers caught uneasy glimpses also of the other officers besides Brale—the two ensigns and the several C. P. O.'s whom the highly technical appliances of the submarine required for maintenance and operation. But in all there were less than two dozen men on board, and the full complement of the crew, they were informed, had not been made up yet.

The feeling that he had certainly made a bad mistake oppressed Adam, and he uttered a low comment to Will that carried this opinion. He then noticed that Giles had taken on a pallor too intense to be accounted for by any ordinary agitation. His lips seemed to have turned indigo, and on his forehead a vein was now alternately bulging and collapsing like the throat of a lizard.

"What's the matter?" Adam asked anxiously.

"Nothing . . . I'm all right . . . just feel . . . it will be only a moment . . . don't pay any attention——"

Adam wondered why Giles was speaking in such breathless gasps. He continued to look at him curiously and then saw him lower his head and stare hard at the deck. But after a moment Giles lifted his face with a haggard smile.

"Better," he said weakly. "Much better."

Still, Adam saw Giles did not want to talk about it, and the attack, whatever it was, gradually passed off. There was, in any case, too much else to think about to pay any further attention to the incident now. And the minutiae of an unfamiliar existence made the next three days nearly timeless.

Before they were over, Giles and Adam were accustomed to their simple duties, and had their heads as crammed with the functions and operation of apparatus as the submarine was with the apparatus itself. It was surprising how soon these things became known to them, taking on the special quality of old friends. In the insanity of malevolent subtlety which the submarine's mechanisms represented, there was also an opposing and satisfying common sense, the logic of pressures, tensions and resistances, of materials unswervingly obedient to immutable laws.

And just as swiftly, both young men now knew and were known by all the rest on board. The sharpness of perception that life on any vessel never fails to produce was microscopically increased by the narrower limits of the submarine. Adam and Giles had formed judgments on nearly everyone, and discovered that they did not have anything in common with any of them, either the regular Navy men, or the sprinkling of other reservists in the crew. They felt lonely as outcasts. Then on the fourth day after their arrival they acquired a new friend.

That morning they heard the news that the *K-13* was going out on a practice run. There was a good deal of extra activity on board. Very early the submarine slipped its

moorings, and ran out on a fine sea, past the harbour shipping, into a day of golden light. It was all as pretty as an outing in a yacht.

The Diesel engines that were used for surface transportation were thundering and clattering below like a boiler shop. The *K-13* rolled rhythmically as a young porpoise, as though it, too, deeply enjoyed its power and buoyancy.

Some of the crew were at work, stowing away deck gear and fitting covers on the quick-firing guns forward of the conning tower. Constant orders were uttered and repeated with the satisfying sameness of a ritual. And now the engines ceased, the submarine lost headway and rocked lazily, and the men on deck began to go below and take their stations. There were dull thudding sounds as hatches and ventilator valves were mechanically closed from inside, and the guns lowered in their water-tight compartments in the superstructure. Wheels turned, setting the diving rudders, and levers snapped into their brackets as hard as shots. A bell rang, there was a hissing of compressed air somewhere, then a loud bubbling and snorting sound and a growling of invisible pumps.

Suddenly, far fainter, yet above it all, the electric motors could be heard spinning in their jackets with the insistent softness of delirium. Everywhere was the smell of hot metal and seeping oil, and throughout the ship ran a sing-song of high, whining noises. Then all at once the rolling from above completely ceased, though it was impossible to say at what moment they had begun to move forward again. Only from the climbing hand of the manometer dial did they know they were submerging, until at last ears began to crack and there fell upon everything a mysterious and ominous quiet.

Adam and Will had been below during this entire time, for they had both on arrival been assigned to the Diesel engines in the after compartment. The Chief Petty Officer in charge was a young man of their own age named Alfred Zacharias. They had noticed that he was Jewish, and guessed

from the newness of his uniform, and his absence of blunt ignorance, that he was a reservist like themselves. He had very clear eyes that spoke of a character at once suspicious and sad, and that guarded look, the refusal to give himself away by as much as an expression, which is the result of an immense caution.

But his intelligence could be felt directly, and his speech issued through small, moist lips that had great delicacy. His looks were marred in the end by a nose like a club, and coarse, wig-like hair. Nevertheless, in spite of these defects, there was something indefinably attractive about him.

However, he had not previously been in the least communicative, and Giles and Adam imagined that he was falling back upon the advantage of his chief's rating, and holding himself aloof in order to accent his petty difference in rank.

He had shown them the very first day what they were supposed to do, his quiet voice seeming to take their uselessness disagreeably for granted.

"Neither of you knows anything about Diesel engines, of course. You probably never saw one before."

"I never had any chance for that," said Giles with a genial smile. "I began life as a newsboy myself."

At this unnecessary piece of information, which had surprised Adam at their first meeting by a similar irrelevance, Zacharias slowly turned his gaze on Giles, whose snub nose looked as if it had been shaped by a youth spent entirely in leaning up against bakers' windows. But the Chief Petty Officer made no comment, and his settled, pessimistic expression did not give the slightest inkling of what he was thinking.

However, though he appeared to regard them with superciliousness, he left them alone, too, and they saw they would have no trouble with him.

And now, during this trial submergence, he had been standing apart, ever since the Diesel power had been silenced. Adam and Giles and several others of the crew were working

among the engines, oiling them and swabbing out grease seepages with cotton waste.

But from the moment the submarine had ceased to move forward, Adam had noticed that Giles now and then paused with his head on one side as though he were listening intently. Once Giles had turned with an almost ravaged look, and whispered hurriedly to Adam, though the latter had been perfectly silent:

"You won't mind it at all! You'll see! Besides it's only for a minute!"

He was now rubbing desperately at a piston that had no sign of any grease on it. There was something vaguely drunken about his attitude, as if he did not know in the least what he was doing. Then as the soft stillness told them that they had plunged deeply under water, Giles staggered and sat down on the engine base, his eyes showing a tragically puzzled look. He was breathing in wretched gasps exactly as he had the day he and Adam first had come aboard.

"Look at him!" said one of the other men. "What the hell's the matter with him?"

They had all stopped to stare blankly at Giles. But abruptly Zacharias was right among them.

"Get on with your job!" he said angrily. "Leave him alone!"

He then suddenly, with a peculiar and unexpected quality of tenderness, set a hand as light as a feather on Giles' shoulder, and stood there saying nothing. But it was clear he mysteriously knew what the matter was. Giles raised sick and grateful eyes, trying to smile without once closing his mouth. It gave him a foolishly infantile look.

Presently, bells sounded in the ship, and orders squeaked through speaking-tubes like the breaking of dry sticks. The submarine was rising again. Soon they were back on the surface, and the Diesel engines began to clatter and thunder once more in the intense, odour-soaked heat.

Giles seemed to have recovered, though his face had a

wan hue. He made no explanation of his attack, as if he desperately wished to forget about it himself.

The day was long. When they tied up at last at their dock at five o'clock, half of the crew were given liberty. As it happened, Adam and Giles were in this shift. They wandered ashore, picking their way uncertainly through the sights of the town. Suddenly they heard themselves hailed, and saw Zacharias coming up behind them.

"You fellows eating anywhere?" he said, falling into step beside Giles, without waiting for an answer.

The three of them dined in a commercial hotel called the Blackman House. Surprised by the unexpected geniality Zacharias was now showing, Giles and Adam began to revise their ideas about him completely, Giles already looking on him with a rush of humbleness that had lost the faculty of criticism.

Zacharias said abruptly as he swallowed a last chunk of manufactured pie:

"How did you happen to get signed on a submarine when you had claustrophobia?"

"I volunteered," said Giles, flushing as if attacked. "I thought it might help me get rid of it, you see. After all, it's only a nervous reflex——"

"You volunteered!" exclaimed Zacharias incredulously.

Giles went on talking with ashamed defiance. The look in Zacharias' staring eyes reported that he thought him a fool, but an accompanying compassion took the sting out of this.

Gradually, Adam began to understand what Giles was talking about, something about having been accidentally shut up in a closet when he was a small boy, and his breathless, choked horror ever since whenever finding himself enclosed in any small space.

"I can't get my breath. I feel as if I'm going to strangle—or go off my head or something."

Adam studied him, wondering, too, what had persuaded Giles in this case ever to set foot on a submarine. He had

a swift perception of the timidity in Giles' gentle heart, seeing now he was really afraid of everything, even of being afraid.

But surely there must be some way of overcoming a malady that lay only in the imagination! In his simplicity, Adam offered suggestions, but both Zacharias and Giles appeared to brush them aside with distaste. He felt himself undervalued, and condemned Zacharias for not seeming to try to help Giles himself.

They finished eating, but continued to remain together, going on to the movies afterward to see a picture called *The Kaiser—Beast of Berlin*.

They were laughing as they came out into the lobby together.

"What's the war all about anyway?" said Adam then.

"What Wilson says, I suppose," Giles answered. "To keep the world safe for democracy."

"Democracy!" exclaimed Zacharias with immense scorn. "Wilson!" He added slowly: "Things would have been different if we'd had Debs."

"Debs?" Adam repeated, startled. "But he's in jail! He's a Socialist!"

Zacharias said quietly: "I'm a Socialist."

Adam was taken aback by this shocking confession, and even Giles seemed troubled. They returned to go on board almost in silence.

But the disagreeable impression, since it had no bad results, soon vanished, and the proffers of friendliness that Zacharias had made were accepted quickly. Will and Adam were even somewhat flattered by this, for as a Chief Petty Officer, Zacharias' privileges far exceeded theirs. Yet he had selected them as associates from the rest of the crew with a realistic awareness of their superiority, and was not in the least put off the scent by their uniforms. He seemed, on the other hand, to despise Ensign Dycer and Chief Torpedoman Schwartz as much as they did, and could scarcely keep a sneer out of his voice when he mentioned them. He made

it clear that he considered only Giles and Adam worth cultivating on board the *K-13*. Yet at the same time he managed to keep floating in the air the opinion that even they were his inferiors.

Soon the three of them were nearly always together, forming a circle inside the circle of the crew.

Yet for all their association, much of Zacharias' history remained still unknown to Giles and Adam. He would let fall now and then an isolated fact about himself, as though offering a single drop of a rare cordial. They had thus learned gradually that he was majoring in mathematics in a free college in New York City, and that he meant sometime to teach there himself. He had been assigned to the *K-13* because his questionnaire happened to reveal a knowledge of Diesel engines. Adam gathered that Zacharias had not been pleased by this result.

"I won't be so smart next time! I thought they'd put me in a factory. We're going to go to sea, you know, as soon as we make up and train a full crew."

He went on to hint, as if justifying himself, that he was not alone in these feelings of alarm. Brale, also, all of them, he declared too firmly, would be glad to be well out of it and somewhere else. He wet his small lips with the tip of his tongue, as if cleaning them like a cat. His alert eyes suggested that he was reminding himself never to be taken off his guard, always to be ready to leap to safety. But this quality of intense self-concern was tempered also by something grave and understanding. There were depths in it, inspired by passion, by a hatred of human misery and human injustice. He seemed far older than the other two.

Toward Giles he showed especial warmth. He frequently asked him, Adam noticed, questions of a medical nature. But though he had an air of trying to get something for nothing, it had to be admitted that it was at least knowledge he sought, and nothing material. He asked Giles other questions also, that drew out the details of a starved boyhood, and unbroken difficulties. Zacharias always seemed

fascinated by these accounts, listening with that intent half-watchful look fixed on his face.

And it would certainly have been difficult to say what Giles would have done without Zacharias in their future diving and submerging trials, or on other unexpected occasions when his phobia seized him. At these times, Zacharias would hover nearby, seeming to absorb some of Giles' distress beneath his heavy eyelids. Saying nothing, offering nothing but a deep comprehension of pain, he seemed to be more helpful to Giles like that than in any other way. Often the sudden, horrifying spasms were checked, or else wore themselves out quickly. As soon as he sensed one coming on, Giles would look around for Zacharias, and Zacharias was always there.

Adam, however, was not sure whether or not Zacharias really liked him, too. The young intellectual Jew seemed to have no patience with the moony and abstract considerations that Adam revolved so anxiously. He often rudely interrupted Adam as if what he were saying was of no consequence, and then the second afterward looked at him with belittling tolerance.

They were now, as their relationship became fixed in a humdrum routine, growing more and more conscious of the perilous imminence of active duty. It was generally agreed that the *K-13* was merely waiting for its full complement before Lieutenant Brale received secret battle orders. Nearly every day they had practice runs, trial dives to various depths, firing drills, and other manoeuvres. Everyone on board was excited by a feeling of suspense.

Then one morning the final three members of the ship's company arrived, and Mallory, Giles and Zacharias met for the first time Julian Gamble.

CHAPTER SEVEN

OF THE THREE newcomers one was a gaunt, taciturn Ensign, another an old, pock-marked Chief with his arm plastered with many service stripes. The third was an enlisted man with a minor quartermaster's rating. But his aspect was immediately arresting, and had he been an Admiral, he could not have carried himself more confidently.

Indeed, there was something overwhelming about Julian Gamble, which was heightened by his calm acceptance of his own superiority.

His good looks made a direct impact as blinding as a light. His thick dark hair, so black as to be full of gleams, burst above a handsome face in which were set a pair of brilliant, arrogant, thoroughly selfish eyes. His mouth was full and sensual, and his nose had the subtlety of a pretty woman's, yet without any suggestion of effeminacy in this perfection.

There was that spoiled look of impatience about him of someone who is irritated if things are not ceaselessly vivid. It was clear that he possessed everything that life had to offer, yet did not think this half enough.

He came in and tossed a duffel bag into a bunk, slapped his hands clean, and stood looking all around with an easy and compelling smile. He spoke with the greatest fluency as if not in the least concerned about what opinions he aroused in others, since he respected none but his own.

"Christ!" he said, addressing no one in particular. "So this is where I'm supposed to live the rest of this bloody war, is it?" He uttered a large and weary laugh, and caught Adam's eye. "However, I did it myself! Wired a Senator in Washington to get me a good berth—my old man happens to know him—and the goddamn fool thought he was doing me a favour by putting me on here. If I hadn't been drunk and not known what I was doing at the time, I'd never have signed. How did you poor bastards get caught?"

A tremendous gusto filled his effortless talk, and while he appeared to rail at everything, his huge delight, his wild capacity for pleasure, poured out with surcharged vitality. He grinned at them all, yet exactly as he might have grinned at a similar number of impersonal objects, or as if he had been quite alone. He did not seem to see any of them.

The intimations of influence, sourcing probably from riches and position, were not lost on any of them. Giles displayed his mild defiance. He said quickly:

"I got here without any pull. Of course, I wanted to. You see, I began life as a newsboy myself."

Adam had a sudden preposterous vision of Giles hastening down a long, many-doored corridor that was Time, and halting at each door to open it, thrust his head inside and say idiotically: "You see, I was a newsboy myself," until at last he came to a final room that was quite empty, yet said it into the echoing silence, and so vanished.

He then noticed that Gamble was surveying Giles after his remark with a kind of puzzled disgust that appeared to sum him up and dismiss him forever. Gamble did not even bother to answer, but removing his gaze he now asked them genially:

"Any of you got anything to drink? I've got a hangover you could cut with a knife."

Zacharias' expression had grown hard and icy from the moment the newcomer had entered. It was plain that he resented the contempt Gamble had shown for Will, a privilege which, though mixed with a certain tenderness, he reserved for himself alone.

He said with a sneering insolence that the blandness of his words only accented: "The skipper usually has some. Why don't you ask him? I know he'd be glad to help you out."

Gamble turned quickly, and their eyes locked in a declaration of hostility. But Gamble struck with a suddenness for which no one was prepared. He said with a violent and shocking brutality:

"What the hell are you anyway—a sorehead as well as a Jew?"

Zacharias did not answer. He was very still. His face held its contained expression. Gamble turned indifferently and began to stow away his things. After a moment, without saying anything more, he went out.

They were all perfectly silent. Will stared at the floor. Adam gazed fixedly at the bulkhead, which sweated around the fringes of its corked insulation. The *K-13* imperceptibly rolled in a faint ground swell. Then Zacharias said thoughtfully, as if this solved everything: "Gamble—he's a son of W. J. Gamble! That's who he is, of course!"

But the impression that Gamble had made on them, the candid display of ruthless inconsiderateness toward helplessness, and of the layer of cruelty beneath his magnetic good-nature, was even heightened in the next few days.

Zacharias had carefully avoided him, but he conveyed the feeling of storing up his resentment for a fitter season. Three days afterwards in the late afternoon, he went ashore on liberty with Giles and Mallory as usual.

They were sitting in a dirty lunchroom having some coffee at one of the soiled, marble-topped tables when Julian Gamble came in and spotted them there.

He sauntered over as if perfectly sure of his welcome, or else unconcerned by the lack of it. They all visibly tightened. Adam noticed the waitress' head go up as Gamble joined them, and a light of interest come quickly in her eyes. Gamble threw himself down, and discovering they had been talking about the war, joined in, nearly silencing them with his forceful declarations, streaked with a kind of aggressive derision. He talked very well, his larger experience of the world dominating them with its callow skepticism. He spoke authoritatively of the current military and political celebrities such as von Ludendorff and Foch, of Balfour and Joffre, being careful, of course, to make no mention of Sims or Pershing, suggesting by implication that these last were dullards. They all admired Ludendorff very much, but not

as much as Balfour, these names connoting a kind of iciness and cynicism, qualities appealing to young men as more romantic and impressive.

But presently, as if from perversity, and knowing quite well its effect, Zacharias turned the talk to his vague dreams of a future revolutionary state. Gamble rose to the bait swiftly.

"Oh, you only want things turned upside down because you think in the shuffle you and your friends might land on top this time. But it wouldn't make any difference. The same men who run things now would run them all over again, no matter what system you had. That's why they're on top now. They're the smartest. Like my old man, for instance."

"In the conditions I'm talking about," said Zacharias, his voice growing shriller, "that would be taken care of, too. There'd be laws to keep that from happening."

"My old man would never allow any laws like that to be passed," said Gamble, shaking his head gravely.

Zacharias, as if now revealing why it was at all times necessary for him to keep his emotions under the closest guard, seemed to lose his self-control utterly, and with it even his astuteness.

"You called me a Jew the other day," he burst out inconsequently. "I suppose by that you meant to insult me?"

"Sure, if you'd like to take it that way," said Gamble easily. His own voice was silky and hard like a piece of aluminum. From his suddenly intent expression it could be seen he was beginning to enjoy himself enormously.

Zacharias turned to the others with a sneering laugh.

"So, he admits it! He even admits it himself!"

He swung back to Gamble. "How could anyone like you possibly understand!" he exclaimed. "A fool—a fool like you!" His voice blew out with passion like a sail, and though his words were scarcely comprehensible, they were now packed with a moving despair. There was something dimly ancient about him, as though he were engaged in

some rite like chanting for the restoration of the Temple.

And this boastfulness, this pride, shocked Adam immeasurably. Like most young men reared in the American Protestant atmosphere, he had always assumed there was something inherently disgraceful about being either a Jew or a Catholic. He had supposed they must be conscious of this taint, too, and never once suspecting himself of intolerance, would as soon have commented on these shameful differences as drawn attention to a cripple's impediment.

But worse still than the improper raving that was now going on was the embarrassing change that had come over Zacharias himself. His voice had taken on a snarling guttural sound, and his accent grown rapidly wretched. Then his tone climbed into a high Oriental sing-song accompanied by sinister gestures and the flashing of his eyes. It was as startling as if Zacharias had torn off a mask, had made it clear at one bound that all interchanges he had hitherto had with them had been expressed in a wonderfully simulated foreign language.

He saw that Zacharias was now too excited to hear his own voice, and Adam was afraid only that he might suddenly do so. He saw, too, that Gamble had a contemptuous awareness of this, and he already knew Gamble's barbarian lack of hesitation about uttering things that not even the crudest natures allowed themselves to say.

And as he sat in dread of this, he heard Gamble remark in a low tone, that held, nevertheless, the most insufferable insolence:

"Sing it! Sing it! Why don't you scream, too, while you're about it?"

Giles, who had been sitting rigid with indignation, and quite pale, stammered miserably:

"You've no right to talk to him like that! You've no right to say such things!"

Gamble did not even bother to look at him. Zacharias raised his fist and shook it under Gamble's nose, and as if helplessly obedient to suggestions for his own ruin, began,

indeed, to scream with an effect of foaming. His voice now filled the entire restaurant, so that everyone was staring. Words of Yiddish vituperation spattered like drops of hot grease through his scarcely intelligible speech.

"Yah, you vill go mad-mad-mad! That's vot you will do! Do you hear vot I say—you vill go mad!"

Gamble laughed contentedly, as if his satisfaction were complete. Adam was unable to stand it any longer. He sprang hastily to his feet, and seized Zacharias by the arm.

"Come on! Let's get out of here!"

Giles began instantly to urge Zacharias from the other side, yet between the two of them, they almost had to drag him away, still yelling insults. Gamble sat watching them go with a soft, ironic smile of much pleasure.

They went mechanically down the street in dire silence. Zacharias seemed to be trying shudderingly to restore his own balance. Giles had a bewildered air, as if he were incapable of understanding what had happened.

But Adam, with his chin shot out and his lips compressed, was wondering how he could even things with the intolerable Gamble. He felt a warmth for Zacharias he had not known before. He imagined himself throwing Gamble overboard from the *K-13* at the first opportunity, and thereafter keeping him off with a stick until he slowly drowned. There was much solace in this fancy even though he knew it to be only a voluptuous dream. Then he remembered that he had always heard that Jews were very revengeful, and decided that doubtless Zacharias would be able to take care of himself.

But the next morning, coming up on deck, he halted in stupefaction at what he saw. Leaning on their bellies over the rail together with an air of easy intimacy, were Zacharias and Julian Gamble. They were actually just at this moment laughing uproariously.

Frowning, Adam uncertainly approached them.

"Ah," said Gamble, "here's his holiness, fresh as a daisy!"

"His chin needs wiping though," Zacharias said.

Adam gazed at them speechlessly. What could possibly have created this ease which their mutual derision of him reported? What could have made either of them forget the scene that had occurred only yesterday? What had happened?

It was difficult to realize that nothing had happened at all, that the bitter personal quarrel, so bursting with cruelty and hate, had been without any actual significance for either of them. And watching them in astonishment, Adam comprehended, too, that Zacharias had not been pacified by any apology or amends from Gamble, but only by his own indifference to the quarrel. What a disagreeable lack of pride! Adam thought, thinking it, indeed, almost as disagreeable as that other pride in Zacharias, the display of which had shocked him so deeply.

But more astounding still than Zacharias' abrupt acceptance of Gamble, was his own, which followed smoothly within a week. And Giles capitulated just as rapidly.

For the handsome youth with the rapacious tongue and selfish charm made up his mind about them, and picked them out of the crew as the only possible associates. And presently Adam, Will and Alfred discounted their first estimate of Gamble. Once he had made it sufficiently clear that he intended always to look out for himself first, and that he was highly dangerous to attack, Julian Gamble showed himself quite willing to put his talents at their service, too.

With his coming, life on the *K-13* certainly became more interesting for all of them. A kind of rooted insubordination in Gamble's nature was accompanied by an extraordinary ability for getting out of scrapes, and an equal skill at knocking down special privileges for himself. He took the longest chances in making life unpleasant for his superiors and theirs.

One of these was Dycer, a reservist ensign of nearly thirty with the convex face of Punch, who never uttered the meanest truism without oratorical flourishes of speech, and nauseatingly covered Brale, or anyone else he feared, with

flattery. Everything about him suggested an intellectual consistency like working butter, but about his treacherous projection of sweetness there was something more repellent.

Ensign Dycer suffused his face with a warm smile also when speaking to a son of W. J. Gamble.

"Well, young man, you seem to be looking extremely fit this morning. As if you had swallowed a U-boat with your breakfast, may I say?"

Then to their delight, Gamble, surveying Dycer with his familiar look of incredulous disgust, would mimic him deliberately to his face.

"And you, Ensign Dycer, if I may say so, are also looking fit. You must have swallowed a battleship with yours!"

Dycer would pretend not to know he was being ridiculed.

Another character they found objectionable was Chief Torpedoman Schwartz, the oldest man on board, whose red, surly eyes had usually an enraged look. But Julian Gamble was quite unintimidated by him, too, and with bland innocence congratulated him for having attained a Chief Petty Officer's rating at his age, and asked him with an air of awe what his pay was. Schwartz looked at him in scowling uncertainty, and twitched his shoulders in an uncomfortable movement.

Even Lieutenant Brale seemed unable to dominate someone whose self-assurance surpassed his own. Gamble was not in the least afraid of him, and coolly showed it. And though Brale frequently glared at him as if he would have secretly enjoyed knocking him down, he, too, seemed cowed by that suggestion of wealth and power which surrounded Gamble like a mist. He even spoke to him in a different way, and though he snapped orders at him fiercely, these were accompanied by a faint, uneasy sound that made them seem like requests.

But Gamble's cool defiance, and his opinion of the unimportance of everyone else on board, was not limited by speech alone. One day shortly after his arrival, they had run out for a morning of target practice. The big, marked floats

were set adrift, and the fulminate-charged torpedo heads were unscrewed and replaced with wooden caps. It fell to Gamble's duty to set the rudders of one of the torpedoes. He tinkered unusually long at it. At length it, too, was fired.

As it left its tube under a burst of compressed air, the lever at the outer edge engaged the torpedo's own engine as it entered the water. A wake of ominous bubbles rose as it raced with sinister directness for its target. But all at once, under the direction of its rudders it began to behave in an astonishing fashion. It abruptly struck off upon a new course, then suddenly in a lifelike yet erratic manner jumped clean out of the water and fell back like a booby with a splash, only to start off on still another tangent.

Lieutenant Brale's face was black as thunder. He swung his eyes to Gamble, who was watching with the most puzzled innocence imaginable. Dycer pulled at his nut-cracker chin, while Schwartz swore in an utterly dumbfounded voice. The torpedo continued its exhibition of insanity. That peculiarly comic quality which invests all stolidly inanimate things in the act of seeming to imitate the inconsistency of the animate was not lacking in its antics. One of the crew snickered, and hastily gulped himself into silence. Then another began to laugh helplessly, unable to stop himself at all.

The torpedo flew again out of the water, executed difficult turns like a ballet dancer, dove again out of sight, and then with an abrupt switch of its course, pointed back and came flying point-blank at the *K-13* itself. Its wooden practice-head scored a perfect hit on the hull with a solid, foolish bump.

Then they were all laughing, slapping themselves weakly, wiping hysterical tears from their eyes, Brale as much as the rest. Only Gamble continued to keep a straight face, and shook his head bewilderedly as if quite unable to account for what had happened.

Laughter served him on that occasion, just as his staggering lies did on others. He seemed, indeed, like someone who was never going to be made to pay for anything.

And Giles, Adam, and Zacharias were also very much alive to his colourful background, that seemed like a scarcely less brilliant frame than the picture it enclosed. His talk was full of vague yet alluring evocations, of youth in a Swiss school, of a year in London, another in Paris, of his familiarity with Monte Carlo, and a suggestion of large sums being flung around constantly with spendthrift velocity. The names of celebrities jumped casually into his conversation, made the more awesome because he himself had plainly no awe of them. In addition to all this he spoke several languages easily, quite unlike the fumbling college French or German, but packed with argot and idiom, and poured out with heedlessness. He had certainly travelled much, boasted that he had had an Italian mistress who was a countess, and another, a girl in New York, who was a vaudeville actress.

Indeed, there was something almost painful about Gamble's facility to do everything brilliantly. The first time they had all gone ashore together on liberty, he had discovered a dusty upright piano in one of the poolrooms, and dropping down in front of it, and playing an accompaniment at the same time with a stimulating violence, had begun to sing some of the jazz of the era in a baritone voice that struck them all as remarkable.

But even more unusual than this was his talent for sketching. Half the tablecloths in town went to the laundry bearing shrewd cartoons of Brale and the others, that were not merely youthful caricatures. And often, while idly talking or listening, he would make a casual drawing that it was a pleasure to watch forming, so facile and sure were the strokes. He would set down in a few minutes an impression of the tangled shipping in the harbour, putting in here a wharf with bold, simple masses, or there a rapid smudge that fixed with wonderful accuracy some clump of waterfront loafers.

Constantly he opened up new vistas of acquirements. Yet these were all he had to offset his restless demand that every-

thing be done his way, done to please him; and his intense concern about himself was combined with a heartlessness about everyone else, and still more, with a plain absence of all honour, or the slightest hint of gratitude.

Gamble's chief liking was clearly for Adam. Adam soon saw that Gamble had, for some mysterious reason or other, decided he was very funny. When he was puzzled by this, Gamble only laughed the louder. And presently Gamble began to torment him in every way his malicious cleverness could find. He finally discovered one means that particularly enchanted him, which required Zacharias' services as an ally.

Then, whenever Adam joined these two, Gamble would plunge smoothly into an account of some recent imaginary love adventure, the story of which was full of the most elaborate indecencies conceivable. It would contain ghastly invented details of the most outrageous depravity on Gamble's part. Zacharias with an air of the deepest interest would draw Gamble out on the subject, his face very straight, as if believing every word. When, unable to bear it any longer, Adam, with a feeling that he was going to be sick, would hastily leave them, he would hear coming up from behind him the roar of their delighted laughter.

But in spite of this, in spite of Gamble's ceaseless taunts, Adam was aware of the other's liking for him. He noticed, too, that Julian seldom tried to make him ridiculous when they were alone, and he began to take note of that strange complexity to be revealed in the psychology of groups, so that their mood altered with a kind of chemical exactness as they were joined or abandoned by one of the others. He and Giles and Julian, he thus discovered, would change to a very different key if Zacharias joined them, and then to still another if Giles left. What were the three of them like, he wondered, when he himself was not there?

All these subtleties of inter-relationship, and the stamp of a kind of permanence about their combined association, seemed settled scarcely two weeks after Gamble had come aboard. But still the orders for active duty, which they

supposed his advent and those with him meant, did not arrive.

They were lulled by boredom, as they mournfully exhausted the few pleasures of the town, playing pool in the dim upstairs rooms of buildings like shacks, full of the sense of time disappearing pointlessly. They went frequently to the movies to see Theda Bara, or William S. Hart.

The feeling that they were not at war at all, and were as safe as so many prisoners, was accented presently by a casual granting of leave. Gamble asked Adam to come home with him, and after a moment's hesitation Adam said he would, if Gamble would go to Brooklyn with him first.

Giles, too, went back to his shabby Boston church, but Zacharias said he would stay on at the base alone. He was reading a big, dull-looking book in German that Adam glanced at curiously. Its title was *Das Kapital*.

Adam had been a little afraid of how Julian would comport himself in his mother's religious atmosphere, but he soon saw that he need not have worried. Julian had never been more charming. At luncheon, even Mrs. Mallory could not keep a smile from her lips. He actually managed to joke successfully about her piety, going so far that a hair's breadth farther would have had the horror of an insult, yet squeezing the last delight out of audacity. Cousin Daniel, too, sprang to life under the stimulus of the gifted youth.

"You remind me of a young man who visited us in '96—no, it was '98. A very spirited young fellow. I often wondered what became of him."

Cousin Daniel smiled and nodded to a ghost. After luncheon he was with difficulty prevented from showing Julian his collection.

"Never mind—I'll see it some other time. And I'll show you mine also then," Julian called back from the stoop as they were leaving.

"What! You collect yourself?"

"I've collected from the time I was a child," said Julian solemnly. "My uncle left me his own well-known collection

in addition. Then my father on my last birthday presented me with the King of Siam's trophies. Besides that——"

"Come on!" whispered Adam, tugging at his sleeve, for Cousin Daniel, with his eyes bulging out, was growing more and more excited.

Julian's family were now staying at their country place in the Berkshires. Adam had never seen anything so overwhelming as the Gamble estate with its ivy-covered stone lodge, its vast shaded lawns, its hidden, castellated house. But the house with its troops of unnecessary servants, and the meaningless activity going on, suggested something hysterical and joyless, that existed only in the hopes of exciting envy.

Julian's family suggested this also. His mother, with an indolent, pink face, lay back in a great huddle of lace, surrounded by several small dogs, a lady's maid, a trained nurse, and a paid companion. Through the halls below, people came and went, half of whom Julian himself did not seem to know. His sister, Felicity, screaming with adolescence, clung to a phone all day long, like a drowning man to a plank. His younger brother, Steele, was also at home, and Adam came upon him firing into a target on the wall of a handsomely panelled upstairs room with a .22 repeating rifle.

In the evening, W. J. Gamble himself arrived, a man with a forked beard and intolerant eyes. Some of the disorder that was going on was then put aside for later continuance, as they all sat down to a dinner as pompous as a banquet.

Mr. Gamble was clearly a self-made aristocrat, and had the especially fierce devotion noticeable in all converts. He did not appear to think much of his son's friend, or perhaps of his son, either. He refused Julian's request for some money with a hard pleasure.

The following day, before they had to go back, Julian ripped open a locked desk, and in front of Adam's aghast

eyes, lifted out a handful of bills and stuffed them in his pocket.

He then went out to the garage and tried to get his hands on the Stutz which, it now turned out, belonged actually to his elder brother. A chauffeur stood him off uneasily.

"I had strict orders from Mr. Rupert that no one was to touch it while he was away."

Julian merely sauntered over and looked inside to make sure the keys were dangling from the ignition. Then he shouted, "Get in, you fool!" to Adam, and started the engine all at the same time. He went thundering out in so headlong a fashion that the chauffeur, who had come hurrying forward to try to stop them, had had to leap back against the wall to avoid being run down.

Then, when they were on the road, with Adam's head groggy from all he had seen, Julian added the final stroke to his horrified impressions by informing him that during the night he had managed to seduce one of the maids.

When, many hours later, sleepy and cramped and dirty, they arrived at the submarine base, Giles and Zacharias met them in the lobby of the Blackman House. They seemed by contrast agreeably commonplace to Adam. He wondered what their leaves had been like. They at least must have been different from the one he had just experienced with Gamble.

So perhaps it was not strange that Adam, in now looking back upon everything, should consider himself so changed.

When today their shift had again been granted liberty, and Julian had announced his determination to get hold of something to drink, he had said meekly he would come along, too. He had delayed a little, as though frightened at the step, so that most of the general liberty party had already gone ashore before he came up on deck and joined his own friends. Well, he had had a drink now, several drinks, and he knew an odd, expansive pride. What a lot he had ignorantly missed!

As the car rumbled on, and the lights of the town sprang up ahead, he heard Gamble shout: "Here's a drugstore, Zach; you can phone her from here."

Then the thought of what further purposes he entertained sent home to Adam an intense anticipation which his reflections had only put aside, but which now made his knees knock softly together in panic, and a dry, lumplike feeling ascend into his throat.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CAR DREW up, shaking like a panting bulldog, in a residential street on the other side of town. Though it was not late yet, the gloomy houses, brooding all about in a desolate stillness, made it seem so.

Clambering out of the car, they looked with anxious interest at the particular house before which they had stopped. It was an ugly, three-story building of stone, wedged in a row of similar impersonal dwellings. There was an alleyway beside its steps leading to a basement. This was guarded by a high iron gate of ornamental scrollwork, and flanked by a couple of windows below the level of the street. A dim reflection issued from here, and except for a lonely square of light on the top floor, the rest of the house was in blackness.

"She said to ring the areaway bell," Zacharias murmured in a low tone.

When he had returned from his phone call with the news that the girl was in and had told him to come right around, he had added that it had been hard to explain to her then about the need for other girls. They had all decided that it might be better to arrange for that after they reached there.

"Come on! What are we waiting for?" Gamble now demanded with his customary impatience, as they stood

staring in an uncertain huddle. But they noticed that in spite of all his previous tall talk and cool declarations of wide experience, he spoke in a whisper that suggested he, too, shared their uneasiness.

Zacharias handed the uncorked whiskey bottle to Giles, and saying to Gamble in a warning voice, "Now mind! No rough talk—not right off, anyway!" advanced into the alleyway with squared shoulders and rang the bell. It made a faint, ominous ping in the sad hollowness.

After a long pause irregular footsteps could be heard, a door opened, and eyes peered at them through the decorative iron grille. There followed a woman's laugh that had a kind of slipshod sound.

"Hello, Al! Come on in!"

She unbolted the grille and held it open for them.

"This is Gloria Grady," said Zacharias.

"How do you do, Miss Grady?" said Adam politely.

None of the others said anything.

They followed her down a long passageway and marched into a big room where only a single weak light was burning. It had something of the depressing elegance of a funeral parlour. Shoved into the corner was a cumbrous chaise-longue upholstered with worn damask. A heavy table with claw feet and a fringed silk covering held some knick-knacks, ashtrays, and sentimental china statuary. Along one wall ran a bevelled, cheap-looking panelling affixed with knobs and catches. This was evidently some sort of cupboard or other.

As their eyes became accustomed to the subdued light, they all gazed at Gloria Grady in a kind of stupid inaction, as if throwing the entire responsibility for their being here upon her. She did not appear embarrassed by their stares.

Going over to Zacharias, she dropped a hand upon his shoulder and said in a husky voice: "Where you been, Al? Thought you'd forgotten all about poor little Gloria. Who are these boys—all friends of yours?"

She swayed a little and peered toward them with a smile

that unattractively suggested a gape. The blondness Zacharias had attributed to her was of a dubious nature. However, she was rather good-looking in a clumsy way, had an attractive figure, and seemed about twenty. But the principal thing they all noticed about her was that she was drunk.

Indeed as she now stood balancing herself with something demoralized and vacant in her air, there exuded from her the blended odours of femaleness, gin, and perfume. At the realization of her condition, Adam was stricken with a feeling of utter misery, at what he could not say. He gazed at her desperately as she went on talking in a disordered but confident fashion.

And thus watching her, he became vaguely cognizant of one of the essential differences that sets women apart from men. For in her drunkenness she seemed to exaggerate, or perhaps only to manifest more boldly, that ceaseless flow of abrupt minor emotions which are the feminine equivalent for consecutive thought.

Her loose face, with all concealments gone, all pretences abandoned, slipped constantly into new and quite unmotivated expressions. A frown of anger or discontent, as her wavering gaze focused upon something of no consequence, would be succeeded by a vacuous smile as her eyes ran sloppily elsewhere. Between these two major expressions there were infinite shades of nearly every variety of hate and sentimentality. She would look sullen at some dim idea, switch abruptly into thick-mouthed defiance, drop as unexpectedly into self-pity, and then take on a cunning, wheedling look as her muddled brain drifted erratically and rapidly from one impression to another, reacting violently yet meaninglessly to each.

Adam, with his contrasting male blindness to the actual dominance of life by emotion, was excited by the oddity of this creature upon whom he now gazed with round and startled eyes, exactly as if he had never seen a woman before.

All this time she had remained standing beside Zacharias, leaning against him and fumbling his hair, while she vacantly

examined the others, as if trying to watch the effect upon them of these caressings.

"Good old Al! I missed you—sure I did! I was sitting all by my little lonesome tonight, so had a little drink by myself. You should have been here! Who'd you say these boys were? Oh well—lot of gobs. Anyway—look—gotta all be quiet for a while. My old man's here. Visiting Ma. They got divorced last year, see. He comes around though. He's upstairs now. But he'll go, sure, he'll go. Then we'll have some fun."

"Know any other girls?" Julian now put in. "Let's get up a party—we'll show you a good time. I've got a car outside." But the usual note of brashness was absent from his voice. The others were surprised by its almost wheedling sound.

The inquiry, however, appeared to anger her. Her mouth took on abruptly its swollen look.

"Girls, huh? Who are you, anyway? Anything wrong about me?—If you don't like it here, you know what you can do! Nobody asked you, Mister." She thrust her face closer to him, and becoming aware of his attractive appearance, her pugnacity suddenly slid away. "Aw, you're cute! Let's be friends. What's your name? But wait until my old man goes. Ain't anybody got a drink?"

Gamble grabbed the bottle from where Giles had set it down. "Here you are. And then you call up some girls for us."

She clutched it, shooting him a derisive look. Her features were again contracted by their look of cunning. "Well, maybe I know some cute girls, but don't be in such a hurry. Got plenty of time. Trouble with you is you think I'm drunk. But I'll tell you one thing. I always know what I'm doing, and don't forget it!"

She poured a big drink into a dirty glass and swallowed it. Beginning to cough and gag, she stumbled across the room and set the bottle back on the table unsteadily with a thump. Hastily Zacharias prevented it from falling over.

She now had her breath again, and blew it out with a loud exultant sound.

"What do you call that stuff, anyway? Squirrel poison?"

Suddenly she burst into a senseless giggle. "Say, I'm glad you all dropped in. Goner have a good time. I like your friends, Al. Now, just wait a minute."

She proceeded to make her way, with her hands grasping the air for balance, over to the long cabinet that filled the wall. She tugged open a couple of its doors, and a sink of veined marble could be seen, with two curved faucets reared above it, like small metal snakes.

With a grin of idiotic complacency, she turned and hoisted herself up backwards. She continued to grin as she sat there, bent slightly forward and looking rather like a dishevelled cat. For a moment they were not sure what she was about.

Then Gamble burst out with a ribald laugh.

"My God!" he said. "Look at her! Well, this is rich!"

Zacharias considered her thoughtfully, Giles frowned and Adam had an aghast expression. But in another moment she had slipped down to the floor, settled her dress, and turned the water splashingly in the tap.

"All the conveniences of home!" she exclaimed thickly, and laughed with imbecilic approval of herself. Her gaze wandered drunkenly in search of a new impulse. Suddenly she reached a conclusion. She swerved clumsily and bore down upon the couch in the corner like a hawk shot out of the sky. She gained it, and fell in a sprawling tumble there on her stomach. She grunted, following this with a moaning sound, and then her breath began to come and go in a steady wheezing rhythm. She had collapsed.

The four young men gazed at each other with an air of stunned perplexity, as if wondering what they should do now. It did not appear to occur to any of them that they could leave. They moved in a directionless way in the morbid shadows of the room, exchanging words in low, dismayed tones.

Adam picked up an old-fashioned photograph album from

the table, and sitting down near the single weak light, began to turn the pages with a solemn examination of Gloria Grady's relatives. Giles crossed to the chaise-longue where the snoring girl lay, and Zacharias and Julian followed him. Giles held his fingers to his lips. With professional gravity, he reached down and began to take her pulse.

Zacharias and Gamble watched him earnestly.

"How is she?" Gamble demanded, as if he could not wait to hear.

"Shh!" said Giles sternly. He dropped her wrist at last, and nodded reassuringly, but reserved his opinion.

"Can't you get her to come to again?" Gamble inquired anxiously.

Giles shook his head. "Better let her rest awhile. Maybe we should go away and then come back."

"How would we get in again?" said Zacharias promptly.

Giles found this unanswerable. He wandered dispiritedly across the room with Zacharias. Adam suddenly closed the album and got up. He went over and joined Julian beside the couch. Gamble was now engaged in turning Gloria Grady over on her back. She emitted muffled groans at this procedure, but still her eyes did not open. While Adam watched, he saw Julian begin to fumble with the hooks on her blouse.

"What are you trying to do?" he faltered.

Gamble did not answer. He pulled the cheap silk blouse over her head, tearing it slightly in the process. She grunted protestingly again, but suddenly her mouth twisted into a smile. An indistinct mutter of endearments trickled from her.

"God, is she drunk!" said Julian exultantly.

The thought sent some association into his mind. He turned sharply and saw that Zacharias and Giles had unearthed a couple of glasses that looked suspiciously like those used for toothbrushing purposes, and were now engaged in finishing the nearly depleted bottle.

"Hey, whose liquor is that, anyway?" he cried furiously, and sprang up and went over hastily to them.

Adam, left alone, dropped down on the couch beside the stupefied girl. He stared at her bared breast that gleamed like satin under the pale radiance. Then he reached out a hand gingerly and touched the skin as if gently poking it. He was unable to breathe as he did this. He now noticed that Julian had left his cigarettes and matches on the couch. He helped himself to one on an undirected impulse. He had smoked only a few times before in his life. He held the cigarette awkwardly, and bent down lower to look at her. Just then the cigarette slipped through his fingers, and fell squarely on her flesh below the throat. He snatched at it hurriedly and in his nervousness knocked the glowing coal from the tip. He tried to brush this off, and succeeded only in pressing it in deeper against her flesh.

Her eyes fluttered wildly, staring at him without seeing him. But suddenly she was aware of what was bothering her. She opened her mouth and screamed so violently that the other three in the corner jumped, and Giles' glass clattered to the floor.

"I'm sorry," Adam cried wildly. "I didn't mean to! Look here—I'll do something!"

But she only shrieked again, pushing him off, so that he rose to his feet, and stood looking on in helpless horror.

After the previous silence, which had been broken only by a kind of sinister whispering, there was now something frenzied about the uproar going on. Gamble and Giles were shouting out to know what had happened; Adam was feverishly attempting to explain, and above it all, nearly drowning them out, the drunken girl's hysterical shrieks, which never ceased for an instant, reported she no longer even knew what she was screaming about.

Suddenly the door at the far end of the room was pushed open, and they saw a man looking in with a pale, indistinguishable face. The next instant they noticed that he was holding a small, rusty-looking revolver in his hand.

To increase the sense of profound unreality his voice came out in a foolish squeak.

"She *is* my daughter," he cried incoherently. "She *is* my daughter. Get out of here!"

They backed away hastily, escaped into the passage, and took to their heels in a stumbling rush. In a moment they had reached the outer door and unlatched the iron grille.

Then they were out on the deserted street, in an ironic stillness that seemed to deny that anything had happened at all.

But they were breathless from an immeasurable excitement. They were elated from their successful encounter with danger.

"Jesus!" said Gamble hoarsely, looking at Adam. "What the hell did you do to her! You couldn't have just burned her to make her yell like that!"

"He was actually going to shoot us," Giles exclaimed with awe. "Imagine it!"

"Well, I won't ever go there again!" said Zacharias firmly.

Suddenly Gamble began to roar. He threw his arms around Adam and held on tightly. Zacharias followed by bursting into his falsetto laugh that was itself irresistible. Then Giles was shaking soundlessly in his own way, and leaned helplessly against the nearest tree. Adam bewilderedly began to laugh, too. He felt indescribably weak.

They laughed as if scarcely knowing what they laughed at, as if not only at the ludicrous outcome of their adventure, but also at the obscure consciousness of their own absurdity in it. They expressed thus a commonality that was their youth, and that enabled them to relish an exquisite present untainted by maturer presentiments. They stood rocking and howling in their uncontrolled exuberance, as if no such thing as disappointment existed, and no distress.

In the universal detachment of the September night, their laughter soared above the chimneys of the city, winging upon an unimaginable flight, a projection of the laughs themselves and their instant of life that would conceivably be still trembling on its mysterious path long after they who had sent it forth had vanished from the earth.

Gamble, who had been the first to begin, was the first to recover.

"Let's go," he said, collecting himself exhaustedly. "I want something to eat."

They tumbled back into the Stutz, wondering what was going to happen next, but perfectly convinced that whatever it was, it was certain to be agreeable.

The car lumbered down the street upon which rain had now ceased to fall.

CHAPTER NINE

BY ASSUMPTION THEY headed toward the Blackman House. Though it was now late, there was probably still time to find something left on the Blackman House bill of fare, the drearily familiar plate of cold cuts, perhaps, or a napkin of steamed clams, flabby from slow extinction in the restaurant refrigerator.

But the course that returned them to the centre of the town twisted through several lifeless streets along the waterfront. On one of these, despondent under a few weak lights, was a dirty-looking eating house that they had not hitherto visited; and with his usual lack of warning, Gamble drew up his car with a jolt before the door.

"How about this joint? I'm sick of that goddam Blackman House food."

Without audible reply, the others nevertheless managed to signify agreement, and they got out and made their way inside.

They found themselves in a big, bare, murky room with some flimsy tables ranged along walls from which here and there paint was peeling in flakes. The place was foul and shabby, but as innocent of pretence as a tramp. Only a few people could be seen, and these seemed to be lingering apathetically, as if they did not know where else to go. There was a damp-looking cab driver with a verdigris-hued

coat collar still lifted around his neck. Not far away was a very old man who had the stamp of a fisherman. His head dropped, and he stared at the cloth, as though he thought hard with dim faculties. Beyond him were a Negro and, still further along, a couple of nondescript others who had the baffled aspect of derelicts. Though some white, raised letters on the flyspecked windows stated that there were "Tables for Ladies," there were no women present.

But the four young man were not abashed or disturbed by these surroundings and this patronage. They made their way in a confident body to the largest table in the corner, and noisily settled themselves.

The others in the dingy restaurant gazed at them vacantly, yet with envious appraisal of their more abundant store of life. The four sailors stared indifferently back, so removed by the accident of youth, of breeding, of fortune, and of aspiration from the malodourous and misshapen legions of the streets as to take their differences for granted. It was as though they calmly supposed themselves to belong to another species. Moreover, they shared at this moment feelings of the utmost triumph and conceit, as if the evening had been the hugest personal success. Had they not been threatened with the last violence and escaped? Had they not pursued the manly aim of seduction altogether free from the cloying stench of sentiment? Had they not drunk hard and swift? They smiled with insufferable pride, and about their smiles lurked the intimation that they were formidable, not to be trifled with or belittled, for they were sharp as razors, and powerful as sledgehammers. That was what their look said. And in their manner was the ultimate contemptuousness of tolerance.

In a moment the proprietor of the place sauntered up to them and passed around some soiled menus. He was evidently a Greek, a middle-aged man with a round head covered with tightly snipped, dust-coloured hair, and an eye full of ignorant cynicism and stupid good nature. He grinned a little as he looked lazily at them.

Gamble did not even bother to examine his menu with its blots of grease and stains of dried coffee.

"What have you got tonight?" he demanded. He then added boastfully: "We've just been shot at, so we want lots to eat. A guy tried to kill us, see, but here we are!"

The proprietor made no comment, and did not seem much impressed by the confession. They all then began to explain earnestly to him what had happened, as if he were some old and intimate friend. But presently they perceived he had not understood a word, and was too indifferent to care.

"You want a steak?" he inquired. "Nice steak?"

"Sure!" said Gamble. "That'll do. Make it rare! And hurry!"

All four ordered steaks, together with potatoes, coffee and pie. But Julian supplemented this for himself with a bowl of pea soup, an order of baked beans, and a couple of pork chops.

"I'm hungry," he explained.

Then as the proprietor collected the menus and was about to move away, Zacharias asked suddenly if there was such a thing to be had as chopped liver and onions. Though he tried to make his demand clear, both by gestures and pronouncing the words with extra loudness, the Greek only considered him with a puzzled frown.

"Look!" said Zacharias. "Let me go out to your kitchen—I'll show you what I mean."

All this had happened so rapidly, and they had made such a racket, talking nearly at the same time and ordering first one thing and then contradicting themselves, while constantly flinging out interjections, allusions and harsh jokes with the abruptness of rockets, that the gloomy restaurant seemed to have sprung into a kind of unprepared and disordered life. They sent bold glances about that expressed nothing but their own boldness, and they seemed to be at once at ease and overstimulated. Gamble's swiftness of impulse and decision had now arrived at an almost hysterical tempo; Adam was rigid with a fixed intensity,

suggesting by his controlled quiet an even greater compression of force; only Giles had anything sedative about him, with his look of humble goodness and sadness.

Just then Zacharias made his appearance again. He swaggered a little as he burst through the screen doors. His eyes had a wary look, like an animal seeking its cave with a dripping victim between its jaws. His manner expressed a mingled furtiveness and ostentation as if caution prompted him to hide what vulgar pride made him long to display. He was hugging close to him an unlabelled bottle of coarse red wine.

The others immediately greeted him with shouts of the warmest approval. With his self-satisfaction perfectly manifest beneath his cold expressionlessness, Zacharias poured out the wine into the thick tumblers.

"Hoch der Kaiser!" cried Gamble wildly.

They clinked their tumblers vehemently together, then drank the toast with aspects of reckless cynicism.

The wine had a strange taste of resin, and was sour, strong and rough. Gamble smacked his lips. Adam found it far easier to get down than the whiskey; even Zacharias drank less cautiously.

"Boy, that's good!" said Giles gratefully. They filled their glasses again with public eagerness. But it was plain they were drinking to express joy, not artificially to create it. Or perhaps their delight was so intense as to give them a far glimpse of the unutterable potentialities of human ecstasy, so that they longed to increase their delight still more.

And the effect of the wine was almost immediate, defining as with sharp outlines their lordly mood. They were enclosed in a special world, and beyond its borders reality lay like a great darkness. Well-being bubbled out of them like a spring from the earth. Now there was nothing wrong with anything.

The bones of their evening's adventure had already been picked clean. They no longer talked about it, or even thought about it. There were too many adventures to think of ahead.

Suddenly in a burlesque tremolo Gamble began to sing:

"Won't you say a prayer

For the boys over there?

They're fighting for you and for me!"

The other three joined in discordantly, all banging themselves violently on the chest at the word *me*, and immediately breaking into sneering hoots. Deeply they appreciated their own sardonic detachment, and swelled with pleasure at their callousness. How sophisticated they were! Yes, that was what their look said now—they believed in nothing; they were skeptics who accepted treachery itself with relish, and welcomed all things that were cynical and ruthless. They gazed with comfort at one another, glad they were not alone in their aristocratic isolation.

At last the Greek came back with a laden tray, and they fell upon the food with ferocity, as if making it clear that even in greed and vulgarity they exceeded other men. Gamble wolfed down his steak and then tried to appropriate part of Zacharias', being prevented from this only by an outthrust table knife.

"You can have some of mine, if you like," said Giles quickly.

"Oh, go to hell!" said Gamble. He snatched a buttered roll out of Adam's fingers instead and stuffed it into his mouth in a bulging wad. Adam's expression was so indignant that they all laughed uproariously. He saved his face by gulping down half of Julian's wine before it was recovered with a snatch that drenched both him and Julian.

Soon they were done, meat and wine were gone, and they sat back, momentarily lulled, with dizzy, entranced expressions.

"We'll be in Boston tomorrow," said Giles idly.

No one answered. He began to pick his teeth thoughtfully. Zacharias fell into mysterious reflections as if the instinct of centuries had reached out and subtly hypnotized him into a contemplation of the unutterable.

Julian unearthed a pencil, and with his head on one side

began to sketch a caricature of the Greek proprietor on the tablecloth. Adam watched gravely. Although it was grotesque and outrageous, with flapping ears and a nose as crude as a wart, the likeness was also there. There was something soothing in the way each precise, beautifully managed stroke of the pencil brought it more and more into recognition, yet increased its derisive exaggerations.

Looking up, Adam then saw that behind Julian's chair the Greek proprietor was watching, too. His mouth had fallen open. There was a look of idiotic surprise on his face. When Gamble threw down his pencil, the proprietor exclaimed loudly, and whipping off the cloth, hurried out to the kitchen with it, where presently he could be heard shouting for somebody.

Presently the swing-doors there squeaked and were held open, and an untidy-looking woman peered at them. She held in the crook of her arm a fretful baby that coughed at regular intervals with a hurtful, irritating sound. An intent look sprang into Giles' eyes. He ceased smiling, and began to frown. Rising, he made his way grimly over to the mother and child.

Adam observed him vaguely. He gathered that Giles was examining the baby, saw him shake his head, and saw him begin to talk with an appearance of inviolable authority. The proprietor came out to listen. He nodded rapidly several times and wrote something down on a piece of paper. Giles returned slowly to the table with a portentous look. But hardly had he reached it, when the proprietor, making the mumbles expressive of gratitude and hospitality, came up to them and set down another bottle of wine before them with a dramatic thump.

Gamble sent out a cat-call of appreciation; looking around him in the dimness, Adam perceived that they were now all alone; the other diners had disappeared as if blown out like mist by their overwhelming vitality.

They began to empty the second bottle with the same energy as the first. Adam noticed how flushed Gamble's

face had become and the erratic brilliance in Zacharias' eyes. Giles' smile had grown rather foolish; his lower lip sagged. He constantly drew it up, and it immediately fell away again. Why, they were all a little drunk! It was wonderful, wonderful!

Adam examined this new state of affairs in himself with feelings of the utmost interest. The whiskey he had previously taken had merely jolted him into confusion, but this wine that mounted rapidly into his brain surprised him with imaginings that seemed magnificent. Was this what intoxication meant—this curious heightening of emotion and sensation, this conviction that funny things were far funnier, while accompanied by a persistent clanging toll of tragic and romantic doom? How splendid was life, how indescribable!

His mind would not stay still. It raced off on a dozen different tangents and concluded none of them. When he did force himself to concentrate, and finish consecutively any idea, he was filled with a peculiar satisfaction as if he had done something very able. "How intelligent I am!" he said to himself, and it seemed to him he had never fully realized this before.

But he was struck with melancholy, too, for he knew he could not make anyone else understand. Words were of no use; only primitive, exultant sounds could express the welter of his seething thoughts; and these would certainly never be comprehended. When he was sober again, however, he would tell them, he would explain everything to them—themselves, and him, and life.

Meanwhile, he discovered, it was as difficult to listen as it was to talk. Julian was describing some experience or other which he found it impossible to follow, but suddenly all the rest were laughing loudly. Adam laughed too, even more enthusiastically than the others.

Then Zacharias began to talk in a way he had never talked before, or rather, about things he had never talked of before. With peculiar relish he strove to describe the oddities, the

traits and cleverness of members of his family, various eccentric uncles, and wise and witty cousins. It was clear he regarded them with admiration and found something endearingly comic in their peculiarities.

To Adam these characterizations were unintelligible and confusing; he seemed to see, instead, a vision of a wretched tenement with fire-escapes descending to a street banked with ash cans and refuse. Dishevelled cats prowled there, and the rumble of trucks and the screams of unkempt children rose on the air. Now and then elevated trains clattered past overhead, as if tunnelling a passage through an element that was squalor. From the dingy tailor shop in the basement of the tenement jets of steam hissed at intervals, sending out odours of hot cloth. And in the rooms back of this, packed together like animals in a box-car, lived the dark, alert-eyed Oriental family, burning with ambition, full of personal humour, and sustained by a stoicism about which there was something humorous, too.

Now Giles burst out, as if vying for honours in sordidness:

"That reminds me—something I'll never forget—I was sixteen at the time——"

And he began to pour out, as if it were inexpressibly good, the dismal story of how he had once competed for a prize of ten dollars on the Amateurs' Night in a vaudeville theatre. Needing the money desperately, he had been scared sick when he found himself on the stage trying to sing, and the audience had pounced upon his fear and howled him down, so that he came off with the booby prize instead. This was a pair of women's pink, frilly drawers, the mere sight of which appeared perfectly sufficient to convulse the house. A couple of stagehands proceeded to hold Giles' squirming body while the thickfingered manager of the theatre pulled up his trousers in the great sport of pretending to put the underwear on him. Then the audience discovered his shameful secret, and why he had struggled in such agony. They shrieked louder than before at the revelation that his socks were held up only by bits of knotted string.

As he described all this, Giles' laughter jumped and bounded without control, and tears of seeming mirth stood in his eyes. But Julian angrily changed the subject as if the confession had something disgusting about it.

He drained off the remainder of the wine in his glass and made sure the bottle was empty.

"Let's have some more of this! What the hell!"

This time he himself got up and, walking with a perceptible lurch, started for the swing-doors. Looking about, Adam saw that the proprietor had gone to sleep in his chair. His head was dropped on his chest in a thick indolence, and his hands were clasped tenderly about his paunch. It must be very late. How long had they been sitting here talking? Time had run like light through the air.

Adam was conscious of a wave of humiliation. He racked his brain to recall an adventure of his own, some amusing experience, the least incident, and could think of nothing. Had nothing, then, ever really happened to him, nothing except this night itself, this moment, this giddy and vibrating present?

He looked up to see Julian returning. He had secured another bottle and carried also a plate of wrinkled ripe olives, together with some slabs of chalk-white goat's cheese. He set the plate down, and unsteadily poured out fresh tumblers of wine all around.

Adam noticed it no longer tasted as inoffensively as it had at first, but seemed to have grown bitter and faintly nauseating. But he drank in a kind of panic, as if fearing that something exquisite might otherwise slip away from him, and that only so could he keep a barrier between himself and an indefinable dismay.

And once again the wine lifted his spirits that had threatened unaccountably to sag. He gazed at the faces of his companions with the warmest affection. What friends they were! How extraordinary they all were! He swelled with pride that he should be one of a company so gallant.

They, too, seemed to share these feelings of admiration.

Zacharias lay back and now actually had one arm around Gamble's shoulders. Julian's pounce of criticism, his merciless acerbity, had been quite put away, as if of them alone he made an exception. Giles' smile had nothing but love in it. With swimming eyes he exclaimed:

"Look here! I'm going to say something now, and I mean it! If any of you should ever get sick or have anything the matter with you, you can always come to me! And I'll cure you for nothing!" He looked at them with such benevolence that it was plain he longed for them to be stricken with the most deadly diseases immediately so that he could begin to practise on them at once.

"By God, Giles!" Julian declared. "You're all right!"

Adam said solemnly: "You know what you are? You're really a saint!"

Zacharias looked at Giles without saying anything, but there was everything in his look, sadness most of all.

"No, no," Giles muttered, scarcely able to speak. "Any of you would do as much for me."

"Say!" Julian exclaimed in an enthusiastic burst. "After the war's over, let's all stick together! We could all go to Paris—I *know* Paris—we could have a hell of a time!"

"But I've got to work," said Giles.

"Yes," said Zacharias, "we'll all be doing different things, you know."

"But maybe we can meet," said Adam hopefully. "We can meet like this every now and then."

And suddenly he was struck by conjectures that were at once vivid and abstract. What did the unexplored future hold for each of them? Nothing but magnificence, he was perfectly sure. For if they knew so much now, if they were so gifted, so strong, what would they not be like five years hence, ten, twenty? The thought took his breath away.

"Let's meet!" he cried. "Twenty years from tonight—right here—right in this place! Let's all swear to do that, what do you say?"

Zacharias nodded, his eyes narrowed keenly. "Twenty

years—a lot of things can happen in that time!”

“I’ll be here!” said Gamble.

Giles took out a small notebook. He pronounced with great seriousness what he jotted down: “September seventeen nineteen seventeen dash September seventeenth nineteen thirty-seven period.”

They filled their glasses again and drank to the agreement.

“You won’t forget?” said Adam anxiously.

“Not me!” said Gamble.

“I’d come here all alone if the rest of you were dead,” said Giles.

“I always do what I say,” said Zacharias.

Adam shook his head helplessly, as though overcome by too much wonder. He gazed somberly at the door, thinking that it was through that very door they would all enter twenty years from tonight. How old would he be then? Forty-one—actually forty-one! Giles would be even older, Giles, the eminent, Christlike physician; and Gamble also, yet more irrepressible and more astonishing than ever; and Zacharias, with something almost frightening in his then learned face.

Yes, they would by that time have everything: wisdom, power, riches, and something still greater, something inexpressible. And he imagined the evening that would follow, the rich, brilliant evening, as they sat and looked at one another and drank like this, and exchanged accounts of the tumultuous and glorious things that had happened to them.

As he stared with shining eyes, the door all at once actually burst open, and with a jolt of surprise he saw standing there, peering in at them, the red, scowling face of Chief Torpedoman Schwartz, and behind him a detail of two men from the crew of the *K-13*.

“Where the hell you bastards been?” Schwartz roared. “I’ve been looking all over town for you. Get aboard! We’re sailing immediately.”

They surveyed him with stupefaction.

“Sailing?” Zacharias faltered. “Where to?”

"How should I know? All I know is, the Old Man got the orders an hour ago, and that's all you're gon'er know, too!"

So it had come at last! The call to action and danger that had seemed so remote that they no longer believed in its possibility was now a blinding fact that obscured all other facts.

Zacharias seemed to pull himself up into sobriety with a physical effort. He struck his forehead angrily several times, as if trying to clear his wits. He had a sick look, as if regretting the folly of having allowed himself to relax even for an instant.

But all the others were looking at Schwartz excitedly. Will Giles' head was flung back on his throat; he breathed deeply and ecstatically, saying "Ahh!" softly to himself.

Gamble burst into a wild laugh.

"Well, by Jesus! So we're in this funny little war at last!"

Adam's heart was pounding. He longed for some rushing activity to absorb the vibration of a thousand nerves.

"Come on, you!" shouted Schwartz hoarsely. "What the hell are you waiting for? Are you deaf?"

They scrambled to their feet, and hastily put down equal shares of money on the check that had been left on their table hours before. On the way out, Gamble stopped and shook the sleeping Greek.

"So long, old sock! Thanks for the party! We'll see you again—twenty years from tonight!"

Then they were outside in the cool, dank air through which floated the harbour smells. The night still hung about them, but it had lost its unpierceable intensity. As though from far away, there came like a premonition the feeling of the onrushing dawn.

They piled into Gamble's car to take it back to the garage. Schwartz and the two men with him rode on the running board. Then they all walked rapidly back to the waterfront. Their feet thudded on the Navy pier. They beheld the riding lights of the *K-13* burning weakly in the

fading gloom, and picking their way there, stepped on board.

Lieutenant Brale was on deck, issuing orders in a low voice from a mouth as unfriendly as a trap. The submarine crew moved briskly about, stowing away gear. Their faces were serious and intent. A small engine all at once clattered like a bad-tempered woman, and the dripping anchor came up and was dogged into its place in the bow. Then the Diesels sprang to life, turning over with irreverent, shattering loudness in the hushed world.

Everything was becoming gray now, ghostly gray pilings, gray piers, and the gray shapes of vessels. A faint breeze ran across the water.

Adam paused for a moment and stared about him. Julian was picking his way down the hatch; Zacharias and Will Giles had already disappeared below.

Young Mallory was filled with an exaltation that was inarticulate, scarcely within the limits of thought, but that gathered all the exquisite sense of living in a single pure emotion. The wine still sang confusedly in his brain; he had no fear of what mysterious ordeal he faced, feeling himself too strong ever to die. He rejoiced with a kind of lust. It was gallant to be alive. He felt like a conqueror in prospect; all this, this wide world of endless horizons, this cornucopia of ecstasies, belonged to him! He smiled deeply and looked up at the paling sky. Then reluctantly he lowered himself through the hatchway after the others.

Soon the mooring lines were cast off, slapping the water lightly. A bell clanged loudly with a harsh, romantic music. The *K-13* began to nose its way stealthily forward across the surface of the gray water.

CHAPTER TEN

THROUGH SEAS AT once gigantic and languid the *K-13* rolled on its course with the gusto of a porpoise.

In this vastness, in which the mere aspect of boundless space conveyed a quality of nobility and sadness, the huge steel tube appeared to have shrunk to insignificant proportions, to have become all at once something of no more consequence than a delicate and intricate toy. The ship seemed gay; it trembled in ecstasy with bubbling sounds, and seemed to dash the crashing spray from quite conceivable eyes: it asserted its own life.

And under the bland September sky an inconstant wind ran crazily, as erratic as a young girl, and as troubled; the bouncing air had a fresh taste.

On board, the tiny creatures to whom consciousness had given the illusions of superiority over the mindless immensity through which they passed were cheerful, too. They were at peace because of their anticipations of bright danger. They were happy because they looked forward to a moment of happiness which, the instant it occurred, would elude them like all such promises, leaving them only this, the memory of their pitiful hope and expectation.

They were friendly and loved one another, even though their cramped quarters did not permit the least chance of that privacy which human beings require to ease their strained equilibrium and piece together the pretences by which only are they able to associate at all; and they took exquisite care of the machine that was their home, as though it were some precious jewel.

Everything sparkled: wheels and levers glittered with hard smoothness, pistons slipped through coatings of iridescent oil; there was no speck on anything, and nothing that was not fixed in a neat mathematical arrangement as orderly as the relationship of the stars.

In his galley Tim Cuff, the ship's cook, a gross man as red as a brick and with a skin as coarse, hovered tenderly over his diminutive electric stove on which an oversized coffee pot was nearly always simmering. In the elaborate lockers over his head were stocks of food, chiefly in cans and as concentrated as possible—soups, fruit juices, beans,

corned beef. He was now doing his best to make these seem interesting.

In the forward torpedo compartment, Ensign Dycer, in charge of the gunners and ratings there, anxiously inspected at least a dozen times a day the devices for which he was responsible, smiling with soft politeness at nothing.

In the central station, where Julian was, and where Lieutenant Brale and rough, good-natured Ensign Brady alternated watches and made constant recordings; in the engine room, where Alfred Zacharias, Giles, and Adam Mallory were on duty, the same eagerness vibrated in the air.

Julian's unruffled sweetness of temper, his captivating interest in everyone, was like the moment in which a king unbends and shows to a flattered company the humanity beneath his stars and medals.

Will Giles seemed to have lost all tendency to collapse in one of his agonizing seizures of claustrophobia. When no one was watching, he often puckered his mild eyes, protruded his round chin, and nodded fiercely to himself.

Adam was so elated as to be confused. He asked frequent questions without hearing the answers, as lost as a lover who has no time for examining his rushing feelings in the exclusive need for experiencing them.

Only Alfred said little, though he noticeably now hung closer to the others. He appeared to be thinking a great deal, and his glance constantly flickered about in alert, useless observation. Now and then he bit furtively and greedily at the nail of his smallest finger.

Perhaps actually, each of them—everyone on board—was afraid. Certainly all this light-heartedness was accompanied by secret terror. Yet this, too, gave a tingle of pleasure like a dive into chilly water. Yes, it was really this that drew them so warmly together, some twenty-two men boxed up in an iron tube in the open sea—their deadly need for reliance upon one another.

It kept them cracking pointless jokes, laughing too responsively, and even increased the informality for which

the submarine service was notorious. They talked with an air of merely making nervous sounds about things that could not possibly matter, things that could not possibly interest them, while their busy thoughts revolved only upon the question of where they were bound, and what it was they were expected to do. Was it some raider they were after, or even another submarine? Only Brale knew, and his harsh lips looked even tighter, as if with difficulty he repressed this momentous and bursting secret. But though he was as contemptuous of everyone as ever, he was no longer hated by any of them, but was now mysteriously imbued with the qualities of a father. On him they cast their uncertainties, and venerated him, and were sorry for him.

So for three days the *K-13* made out to sea until the land behind receded like the memory of a dream, and as if in a dream they were to go on like this forever. On the morning of the third day, when the first light began to tip like spindrift the black water, Lieutenant Brale, in a voice of peculiar deliberation, without warning gave the orders to submerge.

The Diesels instantly went still, bells clanged, men repeated orders as if imitating mechanisms, hatches were clapped shut with hollow thuds, and on the panel that was called the Christmas tree green lights and red lights flashed reports about Kingston valves, ventilating flappers, ballast tanks, and diving rudders. Then all at once the undersea motors were spinning with their petulant whine, and the *K-13* was boring a tunnel just beneath the surface of the water, with only the stalk of the periscope protruding with an air of stupid curiosity like the neck of an ostrich.

Thereafter, Brale, clutching the handles of the device as he swept the horizon, scarcely ever left it, pausing only to swallow some coffee or make two bites of a sandwich. And now in their heightened excitement, their realization that they had arrived at the actual place where something outside of all other experience was to happen to them, the crew of the *K-13* fell into profound silence. The deep patience of hunt-

ing animals enveloped them, and they held their heads obliquely as if intently listening. They watched Brale covertly; and the long day went by.

That night they rose again, to recharge their batteries and ventilate this machine that required breath like a mammal. They idled in the ominous murk under a sky without stars, with doubled watches. At dawn they dove again, and slowly circled all that day without much alteration of position. And again it followed, the surfacing at night, the submergence by day.

Late on the third afternoon, Ensign Grady, who had just relieved Brale, suddenly shouted for him through the central station telephone. Brale came flying, snatched the periscope handles, and peered with crouching shoulders like someone insanely gathering himself to leap into space. In the awe-struck hush the men all about appeared to have ceased living; only their eyes, as if absorbing occult powers, read with lightning perception the language of Brale's rigid back.

This abruptly relaxed in a statement of weariness and dejection. It had been a false alarm. He muttered something to Grady in a low, scornful tone. Then in a kind of anger at everyone and everything, he seemed to take this disappointment as the signal for the failure of his mission, whatever it was, and gave the orders to surface immediately, though the sun was still bold in the afternoon sky.

The monster rose dripping, and Brale went moodily into the conning tower. Soon, from his directions, they saw that they were now returning, without any adventure at all, to the safe, unheroic land.

The good humour, the responsive understanding, was suddenly gone like vapour. Tim Cuff ceased to care what he set before them. Ensign Dycer no longer examined his torpedo tubes with his soft smile. In all of them a surliness, mixed with a joyless relief, instantly took the place of their former attitudes. And all at once, as if reporting the effort by which they had sustained themselves at such a height for so long a time, some of them looked worn, actually emaciated.

Quarrels began to break out, filled in by silences of sick dullness. The weather that had been so robust and demanding suddenly grew lifeless also; the wind fell with a last sigh, the still sea mocked all hopes of achievement by men, and in the dead calm it could be surmised that it was now probably unbearably sultry ashore.

On deck, working in dungarees, Giles lifted his head to say to Julian nearby:

"Well, anyway, we're not going to die this time!"

As if infuriated by this consolation, Julian snarled disagreeably: "Oh, shut up!"

In the engine room, Alfred Zacharias said to Adam in a tone of the bitterest resentment:

"Of course. I knew nothing was going to happen. I could have told you that from the start!"

Adam looked at him in some surprise, for it had struck him during the cruise that the feverish shine in Alfred's eyes had expressed a rather disgraceful anxiety. But he decided he was probably unjust, since he himself was not so greatly disappointed to have a whole skin, although a return to the monotony of the naval base struck him as intolerable. An injury, a slight one of course, at least would have been interesting.

They pushed on steadily all that night, and in the morning they were astonished to see in the distance an unfamiliar promontory beckoning them like a crooked finger. So they were not returning to the submarine base after all, but to some new, unexpected port!—and curiosity lifted their dejected spirits a little. Those on deck stared hard at the remote headland, and the news spread rapidly in mutters through the ship.

The sun began to come up, warmer and warmer, and over the water, still as an invalid, a haze wavered like the emanations of a disease. This thickened rapidly, and then the blanket of mist fell smotheringly upon them.

In a second it blotted out everything—earth, water and sky. The moment before, they had seen the pale shore,

ringed with a thin line as white as cream, and back of it some sprinkled dots that were the houses of a town; and now there was nothing.

And this impenetrable veil seemed to deaden sound also, charging everything with a great softness like snow falling on a Winter landscape. The *K-13*, which up till now had been travelling impatiently ahead at full speed, was abruptly checked and began to move on at little more than four knots.

All hatches were secured, except the entrance from the conning tower. Four or five men were still moving about on the deck like ghosts. Inside the watertight superstructure, Brale and a quartermaster guided the submarine's cautious progress. The fog was now so dense that it was impossible to make out anything more than a few feet away from the sighting port. Brale, his harsh face set in a fixed expression, could just barely see the wave-breaker and the occasional dim splotches that were the men on the deck. The inside housing of the periscopes was clammy, and there was no sound but the air sucking into the ventilator valves behind with a resentful, steady gasping. Faint gleams of light stole upward through the hatch, and were engulfed instantly by the billion particles of fog.

Upon this unreality, in which the senses that report life were now rendered futile, there fell at last a noise, beginning all at once, then dying out, and then beginning again—the lonely clanging of an iron bell buoy, anchored just beyond the tip of the land. It was an unutterably forlorn sound.

They were now taking soundings as they crept by inches, and Brale continued to stare intensely at the white wall through which they passed, as sleepers pass through walls in dreams. The bell grew louder and more sinister, not as if protecting them, but as if savagely longing to reach out and seize them; it was just abeam; then abruptly its clanging reproached them a little way off; they had passed the shoal water safely. It began to grow weak and deserted behind them. They were in the harbour itself.

The *K-13* stole on as delicately as a barefooted girl.

Suddenly a violent, shattering blast burst the grey air apart just forward of them—the foghorn of some vessel putting out to sea.

This shocking sound came so unexpectedly that they were rocked on their heels. There was no time to demand why they had had no earlier warning, or even to ask from what quarter the vessel was bearing down on them. With that speed dictated by instinct, which makes actions directed merely by thought seem lethargic in contrast, Lieutenant Brale thrust the quartermaster who was with him down the hatchway exactly as if he were leaping upon him with the design of murder. He himself, without so much as a glance at the shadowy figures on deck whom he instantly knew he was required to sacrifice, went clattering after, at the same time yelling an order below which blended into a single sound that was gibberish.

But the men in the control room knew immediately what was demanded of them, and without the delay of a second, hands sprang to mechanisms, wheels whirled, levers snapped, and everyone was working feverishly.

In an incredible space of time it was all done. At one moment the *K-13* was gently nosing her way along the surface; at the next, with her conning tower hatch snapped shut, her diving planes set at their sharpest angle, her ballast tanks letting in violently rushing water, and her undersea motors humming at full speed, she had plunged into the depths like a fish sounding, and was gone.

She was gone, yet swift as she had been in her frantic race for safety, it was not swift enough. The unknown vessel that had silently charged upon them as though stalking them, and had cried out only in the moment of horrible triumph, slid across her bubbling wake; there was a hideous, grinding noise from above, and a quiver ran throughout the length of the *K-13*. She bobbed foolishly several times like a cork jabbed at by a bay in a pond, and then all at once righted herself and was still.

Lieutenant Brale, his face unmistakably pale, stared at

the others in the central station. They gazed back in a kind of grotesque solemnity as if they had just suffered some unexpected slight to their feelings. Adam, who had come off duty only the moment before, and had been caught in here at the moment of the collision, did not yet know what had happened. In addition, everything now seemed extraordinarily peaceful. He heard Brale say in a low, unbelieving voice:

"By God, are we all right?"

Brale then took a quick glance at the main instrument panel with its array of hands, dials, and complex recording devices. Seizing the interstation telephone, he snapped inquiries into the forward and after compartments of the ship. When at length he turned around, they saw by his expression that the danger had been passed and they were miraculously safe. The collision had apparently done nothing worse than disable the superstructure, pushing it back like a broken thumb, but without opening any seams in the hull. Except for the handful of men on deck, when they had made their crash-dive, no one had been lost, and perhaps even these would manage to reach shore in spite of the fog.

Suddenly everyone in the central station was smiling; everyone had taken up again the welcome task of breathing. Somewhat shakily Brale now gave the orders for a slow surfacing. The hissing noise of tremendous pressures, passing through the reducing valves and blowing the sea water out of the ballast tanks like so much smoke, was a comforting sound. The quivering hands of the instrument dials began to report their co-ordinating functions.

But all at once there came from Brale a muffled exclamation. Ensign Grady, peering over his shoulder, blew out his cheeks with an air of outraged protest. The aneroid barometer, whose duty it was to report internal pressures, seemed to have lost the logic that was its identity. The pointers of still other indicators were now beginning to swing rapidly back and forward without sense.

But it was no longer necessary to study the instrument

board to ascertain that some catastrophe was happening; the whole deck on which they stood began to slant violently backward and forward under their feet like a descending seesaw. Loose gear was suddenly falling and banging all around them as they snatched at wheel spokes and overhead conduits in the necessity of retaining their balance. Lieutenant Brale made a staggering lurch towards the interstation telephone, but before he could reach it, it rang instead with what seemed a hysterical note.

He had the report in a moment, and swinging around as the deck continued to slide straight downwards, he exclaimed in a voice of dismay that sounded ludicrously indignant:

"The main induction valves in the after compartments are flooding. We're going down by the stern!"

With an effort he shook off the slightly dazed effect that his own information seemed to have had on him, and began to shout orders above the loud confusion to which all in the central station were now contributing equally.

"Secure the after bulkheads! Blow all ballast!"

There was a clumsy rush of most of the men in the control room, among whom Adam Mallory, in the desperate need to do something, if only to run, now found himself. The once level passageway now seemed to his horrified comprehension to have become as steep as the sides of a well. He fell into it as into a well, along with the others, aware in the midst of his panic of how his eardrums were cracking and snapping under the tremendous pressures to which they were being subjected as the submarine plunged into the depths like a lump of spinning lead.

He found himself at the bulkhead that divided the engine room and the compartments still aft of that from the rest of the ship. Men banged against him, screaming hoarsely. They began attempting to close the watertight steel door, but in their panic some were now struggling against others while cursing or shouting entreaties with equal uselessness.

At the opposite end of the engine room, towards which he looked, Adam now saw the sea pouring in out of the

flooded torpedo compartment. There was something hideous about this sight, like life gushing out of a body. And scrambling frantically to reach the door through the rising water below, five or six men from the stern divisions of the ship were now struggling upwards on their hands and knees. Adam made out the bulbous features of Chief Torpedoman Schwartz, his big form pitching from side to side like a kite in a gust. He was yelling from a mouth opened its widest, but in the uproar going on, his voice could not individually be distinguished.

Just then, as he grasped the strongback of the door and pushed, Adam saw Alfred Zacharias also, with his lips drawn back over his gums like a death's-head, floundering and slipping in desperation as he tried to reach the safety of the passageway. The screech that he was emitting could at any rate be picked out clearly in all the monstrous hubbub.

All at once Zacharias lost his grip and went sliding back. From a confusion of tangled forms, Adam then saw Will Giles emerge, saw his hand make a snatch at Alfred's directionless body, and arrest it. They crawled up the remainder of the way together and flung themselves through the narrow aperture into the safety of the passageway.

The lip of water pouring in from below was rapidly widening. As the door at last began to swing forward and shut, Chief Torpedoman Schwartz, now almost at his goal, but with the water up to his chest, groped out with an arm that strove to be longer. The door continued slowly to close. On Schwartz's bumpy face, only a few inches away, there appeared an imbecilic look. His arched eyebrows suggested exactly the face of a tearful woman pleading with the lover who plans to desert her. The next moment the door crashed out all further sight of him and the others with him. As if in a last refinement of callousness the men who had saved themselves dogged the wedges against the watertight frame.

All this time, though everything had, as a matter of fact, occurred in only a few seconds, the ship had been steadily descending, even while its electric motors sought feebly to

carry it instead to the surface. Adam began to haul himself back with the rest to the comparative security of the central station. Just ahead of him he saw Zacharias, with Giles still supporting him by an arm thrown round his shoulders. Zacharias was making the fumbling steps of a child who is only learning to walk. Now and then his head fell from side to side as though his neck were broken.

In the interior of the central station, the survivors of the crew of the *K-13* moved about in a drunken and disorganized manner. There was no shame anywhere. Tim Cuff was snivelling and carefully wiping his nose on his sleeve. Ensign Dycer, collapsed into the most abject funk, kept opening and shutting his fingers and saying to himself over and over in a silly voice: "Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" Another man had his eyes tightly closed as if trying thus to abolish reality. Still another, tugging at a religious medal strung around his throat by a small chain, appeared to be praying in the most frantic haste. His lips kept making ellipses and circles without a sound. Ensign Grady was examining what appeared to be a bruise on one knuckle, with an appearance of the deepest concern. Julian Gamble had his head thrown backwards and his gaze flung up, as if recalling the imagined bank of mist up above, the unseen surface of the sea, the sweet air, which, together with the promise of life, were now all rapidly receding from him. Lieutenant Brale, paying no attention to any of them, stood watching with a stern air the manometer that recorded their increasing descent.

Suddenly there was a dull thump that made them all lose their balance. The *K-13* gave a short, swaying movement, and was deeply still. They had hit bottom.

In the pause that followed, Brale turned from the manometer dial with a grunt of acceptance. It was as though he were now quite satisfied. And the realization that they were still alive, still breathing and uninjured, seemed to dawn on the faces of all of them with surprise. They then noticed from the way that Brale was looking at them that he was

counting them, and they began secretly to count themselves and to notice what members of the crew were missing. Only twelve remained.

But in their extremity they looked hopefully at Brale as if by virtue of the gold stripes on his sleeves he might be able to master the colossal forces arrayed against them. They took comfort from the look of calm fortitude in his expression, without being aware that it was they who had set it there, forcing him to be brave by the simple act of throwing on him the responsibility for themselves. There was no longer anything harsh in his eyes. They seemed to show an astonishing gentleness.

He now went to the phone in a perfunctory way, and pressing the buttons communicating with other parts of the ship, assured himself of what he already knew, that there was no one alive to answer. While they anxiously watched, he pulled the lever of an air-pressure vent to the after compartments. A great roaring and shuddering ran through the frame of the submarine without budging it a particle. As if fearful of wasting another ounce, he shut it off abruptly. He turned as if to signify there was now nothing more to be done.

Then when it seemed that at least nothing else could happen to them, something did. The dazzling whiteness of the central station was abruptly plunged into darkness. The lights had gone out. But the next instant they slowly came on again, growing softly and tantalizingly brighter by degrees. Even while it seemed that they might, perhaps, be all right, they went out again, fading slowly this time, as if suggesting the painful, delayed extinction which all life on board now faced. Then they returned, glowing brilliantly once more, and Adam, in a pointless longing to fix the shape and position of everything around him for the last time, gazed hungrily at the glistening paint and shining brass, at the wires, wheels, and screens, the compasses, control boards, and cylinders, the vents, valves, and tubes that would represent his last memory of the world. The lights went out

quite suddenly this time, and he found he could not remember anything. Then when they came back still again, rather faintly, showing the waxen faces of the men staring all about, it was agony. When this time they disappeared and did not return, he experienced a strange relief.

In the pitch blackness which had now settled down with firmness, Brale's voice, full of compassion, could be heard issuing mild orders:

"Break out some flashlights from the supply lockers, anyone who's near, please, and pass them around. And a couple of you up forward bring some blankets in here. Cuff, see if you have any hot coffee left. Oh, and one of you fetch the phonograph out of my cabin!"

There were rustling and fumbling sounds. Presently a pale beam pierced the interior of their tomb, then another and another.

"Use those sparingly!" Brale urged rather than ordered. "Only when necessary."

Some of the men were already coming back with blankets. It was growing surprisingly cold. Cuff returned and handed out scanty mugs of coffee, but it was only lukewarm and did not help much. But the sane activity, and the pleasure of receiving orders, seemed to have soothed all of them. They were noticeably more cheerful, as they wrapped blankets around their knees and shoulders and made themselves as comfortable as possible.

Meanwhile Lieutenant Brale drew out a pen and small notebook, and with his flashlight resting on his lap, began coolly to write what was doubtless his report of the accident—a report that would, of course, be of value if months later the submarine were ever salvaged. His obedience to his duty to the vanished world above had something heartening about it. And the flashlight that picked out his unperturbed features, as he now leaned back against the moist cork insulation, seemed deliberately designed for that purpose, as if inviting them all to look and share his calmness.

In the darkness all about, some of the men could be heard

whispering, or exchanging low mutters. Once a laugh inconspicuously broke out and rippled away. Adam stared hard at Brale, lost in contemplation of this admirable man. Had he once actually supposed, in the distant time when he had been on earth, he had hated him? But suddenly his thought struck off at a tangent with the abruptness of delirium, and he found himself recollecting the frenzied moment a little while back when he and the rest with him had slammed the steel door shut in Chief Schwartz's face. Schwartz and those others with him were bottled up there only a few feet away, like so many specimens in a scientist's flask. Adam licked his lips and a faint moan of horror broke from him. Instantly a low voice spoke in his ear:

"Is that you, Adam?"

It was Gamble.

"Yes," Adam whispered. "Are you all right?"

"Never felt better!" said Julian. He, too, began to laugh, but in a quiet, controlled way, without any suggestion of hysteria or even of fear. "A short life and a merry one!" he said with a surprising quality of exultation, as though only now, in the moment of confronting the inevitability of death, he was completely alive. He added cheerfully: "God, won't my old man be sore at this! He'll give the Navy Department hell for it!"

Adam marvelled at him, for there was no sign of bravado in his voice, but instead the superiority of a supreme indifference. And then for the first time it occurred to him that he, Adam Mallory, was actually going to die. But that was impossible, he said to himself in a stunned way. Die? People, of course, died constantly—but he had never supposed that such a thing could actually happen to him!

While he tried to grasp the enormity of this realization, and all his nerves trembled in outraged denial and alarm, he was rescued from the ghastliness of his imaginings by a peculiar noise that now broke out across the way from where he was lying. It was a kind of scratching sound accompanied by a low, unbearable gasping.

Brale's lifted light flashed there instantly, and Adam saw that it was issuing from poor Giles, who was now clawing at the deck like a shot animal. At the same instant Alfred Zacharias screamed at the prostrate man in a voice so unbalanced by rage as to be shocking:

"Stop that man, God damn you!"

Giles' quivering body grew still, only shivering at intervals. He sat up slowly, and said in a weak, grateful voice: "Thank you, Alfred, that was just what I needed . . . just what I . . . Thank you . . ."

His voice trailed off slowly, with its familiar catch of breath.

Brale, who had seemed about to say something, now appeared to think the better of it, and without comment resumed his writing.

The silence deepened, the whispers grew more infrequent, and in the increasing cold, men rolled themselves more tightly in their blankets. At last Brale returned his pen to his pocket and put away the notebook. He thought for a moment or two, and then began to speak:

"Attention, officers and men! I won't pretend for a minute we aren't in a very bad way. But we have a chance just the same. The collision will certainly be reported right away. And you can depend on one thing—the Navy will do its best to get us out. We may pick up a message on the oscillator even before nightfall. Meanwhile we have plenty of food and water, and enough carbon-dioxide absorbent. But the main thing is not to expend any more energy than you have to. Keep your heads, keep cool, relax as much as possible, and try to keep from worrying. That's all."

A faint murmur ran around that had, nevertheless, the quality of profound applause. His level voice, untainted by any theatricalism, with its surprising sanity, and its comfortingly realistic, somewhat nasal accent, reassured them, and filled them with momentary peace.

Presently Adam got up to stretch his cramped legs, and then wandered slowly aft without knowing what it was he

meant to do. Soon he came to the closed bulkhead. Setting his flashlight against the thick glass of the eyeport, he tried to see inside. For a long time he could make out nothing at all. Then gradually he was able to detect the slow swelling and collapsing of the subterranean waters in there. All at once something came floating by in the cozy dimness . . . it was impossible to say what it was—something like two long streamers waving slowly and gracefully, perhaps the roots of some gigantic seaweed of the depths. With a start he suddenly realized what he was looking at—Chief Torpedoman Schwartz's trousered and dangling legs.

Adam looked away quickly. He made his way back to the central station, and sat down by Julian again. Julian was drumming with his fingers, as though he were entertaining himself by the composition of an elaborate rhythm.

Adam pulled his blanket closer. How cold it was! He could hear a man's teeth chattering across the way unceasingly. It was hard to think of anything. He wondered if he ought to keep on trying. The torpor and strange listlessness experienced at great depths had begun to come over him. He noticed vacantly that nearly everyone else seemed to be sinking into the same apathy. Now and then he even asked himself where he was. Julian, too, was quiet at last. But suddenly Lieutenant Brale's phonograph broke into life with a noisy brightness, playing the tune that Adam and Zacharias, Julian and Will Giles had all sung together only a few evenings ago:

*There are smiles that fill my heart with sadness,
There are smiles that fill my heart with glee,
But the smiles that fill my heart with gladness
Are the smiles that you give to me!*

Adam listened drowsily.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE *K-13*, WHICH had pushed its soft course through the fog bank into the harbour of the obscure fishing village, and there sunk without a trace, had at any rate altered the face of the village itself.

It was as though the huge cylinder that now lay motionless in the ooze at the channel bottom had possessed the inscrutable power to bewitch from a distance, for the life that had passed out of its noisy mechanisms seemed to pass on simultaneously into the settlement ashore, and this sprang all at once from lassitude into chaotic action.

In the Summers a few tourists and vacationists came here, making a mild, brief stir, swimming when the tides were right, or wandering across a scrubby, nearly deserted golf course, or leaping into the air with tennis rackets in their hands, and tramping with patronizing laughter to the ramshackle movie theatre in the evenings. But when September came, these intruders vanished, and, left to itself, the town slept peacefully again.

It had been so now; in the sad Autumn air during the last week or so the village had fallen dormant once more. Then suddenly it was alive as it had never been, in a burst of unfamiliar and bewildering activities. Overnight, the shopkeepers and fishermen beheld an abrupt invasion of many strangers who were quite unlike any others they had ever known.

A large proportion of the first newcomers seemed to have been sent by various syndicates and newspaper services. They stampeded the small telegraph office whose sole clerk had already an appalled look at the demands that were now being made upon him. They gathered in each other's rooms at the hotel or in the lodging houses, playing poker at all hours of the night, and drinking whiskey copiously.

Then presently it became known that Commander Comfort, the Navy's principal salvage expert, was on his way here to take full charge of all operations and decide which

of several courses to follow, a decision upon which everything depended. For the chief cause of all this fever was that some feeble tappings had been definitely ascertained as proceeding from the sunken submarine. Some, if not all, of the men down there were still alive; the only question was how long they could hang on, and whether they could be rescued in time. And so no mistakes could be made.

The *K-13* had suffered her collision and gone to the bottom early on Wednesday morning. It was on the noon train of the following day that Mrs. Mallory arrived.

She came alone, for Cousin Daniel happened to be in bed with a severe cold on the night of the accident, when she had first learned the news. Mrs. Mallory had gazed at the headlines of her evening paper quite steadily, seeing her son's name in the list of the crew printed in bold-face type. Her brain seemed to stop like a watch, and it was some minutes before she could realize what it was she was gazing at so fixedly. Then she put the paper down quickly, realizing that Adam was now trapped at the bottom of the sea in a manner that suggested some ingenious and hideously slow torture.

She had to do something to prevent herself from fully realizing that, or at least to put it off as long as possible; and she did not know what else to do except to go to him, to go at any rate as close as possible to where he was, telling herself that he might like to think she had done that, and would hope that she was near.

With her thin, delicate face in which the dark eyes burned with the fire of her conviction, she sat in the banging coach of the train that carried her at last to the scene of the disaster. Every seat was filled, and some passengers were even standing in the aisle.

She opened her bag and, taking out her Bible, began to read. But for once it brought no peace. The words jumbled together, and she saw she did not know what she was reading, as if she were thinking of something else, though what that was she could not say. But she was sure it was

not of Adam, for her mind kept screaming the warning that she must not do that—not yet; and with a deadened feeling she began to stare around her at the other passengers.

Across the way four men with a suitcase spread on their knees were playing cards, and every so often one of them shamelessly passed a flask to the others. In front of them was a still more shocking group, occupying restlessly and noisily four seats together. They were an entire family of Jews, all the way from a mournful-looking, wispy father, a mother bulging in a gross parody of the female figure, sons and daughters of various ages, a presumable uncle and an aunt, to some very small children engaged in a perpetual battle against any discipline whatever. All of them seemed to be eating more or less continuously, munching thick slabs of rye bread from which droppings of onion fell at their bites, while a gabble of arguments, interjections, loud complaints, and screams at the indifferent children proceeded from them without a break.

While she was still gazing at them, and wondering whether it was conceivably possible they could be making an outing of a visit to the scene of the disaster, an unexpected voice all at once spoke in her ear, with the startling effect of the chirp of a robin:

"I wonder if this railroad has ever thought of using round wheels."

Mrs. Mallory turned slightly, and for the first time observed the woman who was sharing the seat with her.

She was about Mrs. Mallory's age, and had the same slight figure, though this seemed less an indication of delicacy than the result of privation, the result of care and toil, and even of undernourishment. She was quite shabbily dressed, in a hat that was long out of fashion, and a coat that reported that it had been repeatedly and neatly mended. Underneath her absurd hat, her face managed to look quite youthful in spite of a mesh of fine, covering wrinkles; her eyes sparkled with a great deal of spirit; while her tiny jutting nose, and the tiny mouth set just beneath it, gave

her exactly the look that had been suggested by her voice—that of a small, rather plain bird.

Mrs. Mallory, not in the least understanding what had been said to her, looked back blankly.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "Round wheels?"

The face of the little creature puckered into a grimace of comic intention. She answered with a look of deep relish:

"Yes, instead of square ones, you know."

Mrs. Mallory saw that she had been the recipient of a joke, but she had too much self-respect to smile at what did not amuse her, and she kept silent. But as if unabashed, the other woman promptly went on in a kind of twittering cordiality:

"Are you going far?" She then added, with her head cocked a little on one side: "As the balloon said to the bullet."

Indignant at being subjected to these enervating jests, and harassed by her own unhappy thoughts, Mrs. Mallory, to chill her neighbour and finally be rid of her, replied sternly:

"My son is one of the sailors in the submarine that has just gone down. That is where I am going."

To her astonishment the little birdlike woman assumed an expression of the most incongruous pleasure. She exclaimed brightly:

"Well, well, that's where I am going, too! My son is on board also! His name is Will Giles. What's your boy's?"

Mrs. Mallory regarded her with stupefaction. The ghastly jauntiness, the wretched attempt to be funny under these circumstances, the woman's seeming unawareness of her tragic mission, were surely appalling. Mrs. Mallory concealed her detestation behind a look of fixed grimness. Without a word she took out her Bible again, and opening it at random, began to read with fierceness.

Mrs. Giles at last looked quite crushed, but there was a humility about her that suggested she was used to being crushed, and had not yet found out why others wished to do that to her. Meanwhile Mrs. Mallory recalled the name

with a slight start. Will Giles? Wasn't that one of Adam's friends, whom he had mentioned in his letters now and then? But of course it was! What a frightful young man he must be to have such a terrible mother! Then forcing her thoughts upon God, and upon Adam himself whom God had assuredly made in His own image, Mrs. Mallory did not lift her eyes from her Bible until at last the train, coughing and banging, arrived at the station that was her destination.

She waited a little in order to allow Mrs. Giles ample time to precede her, and succeeded in losing sight of her in the crowd. But her own way was blocked on the narrow station platform by the vociferous Jewish family she had previously noticed.

The younger children were still in an uproar of self-willed desires, and now were mostly struggling to escape from the hands that held them. Their elders, as if holding a conference, filled the air with threats, demands, and inquiries, without ever receiving any actual replies, or even seeming to expect them.

The complacent, fattish back of the presumable uncle, with cigar smoke wreathing out behind his ears, barred Mrs. Mallory's progress as completely as a wall. She touched his arm slightly.

"If you'll excuse me, please, I should like to get past."

But he paid not the least attention either to her words or her touch, though he could not have failed to be aware of both, and in the exhaustion of her nerves and the pitch of her misery, Mrs. Mallory did an astonishing thing. Raising the umbrella she carried, she jabbed the point at a spot between his shoulder blades. He then with a grunt, yet without any appearance of resentment at all, shambled off a little to one side, while his voice continued to add to the clatter they were all ecstatically making.

A battered car, that carried against its windshield a placard stating it was for hire, caught her eyes, and getting in, she asked to be driven to the hotel.

The hack lurched to a stop before an unpainted, frame

building that was the town's single hotel; and getting out, Mrs. Mallory saw that a very splendid car, a limousine of English coachwork that glittered with newness like patent leather, had drawn up at the same time. A chauffeur had sprung to open the door, and two gentlemen stepped down. One was thin and elderly, with a waspish face; the other, considerably younger, had a bland, babylike smoothness. His eyes moved quickly in his still head as if he did not wish to expend the energy of any larger muscles. He took the older man's arm solicitously, and yet rather as though he were his captor, and meant to see that he did not escape from him. They followed Mrs. Mallory into the hotel.

She made her request of a loutish-looking young man who seemed to be the hotel clerk, but before she had even finished speaking, he answered indifferently:

"All full up." He then began to explore his teeth with a toothpick in a kind of lost fascination.

Mrs. Mallory gazed at him quite desperately. "But what am I to do? Haven't you anything—anything at all? Or isn't there some place you could recommend to me where I can get a room?"

"Everything's full up all over town," the clerk repeated, as if with solid satisfaction.

From the direction of his eyes she was aware he was no longer even looking at her, but at someone else over her shoulder. Turning, she saw the two men who had come in just behind her. The bland, younger one advanced to the desk, and then opening a thick billfold, fished out a number of cards and badges that were evidently the credentials of his membership in various fraternal societies.

At the same time, leaning forward, he said in an assured and confidential voice:

"You had my wire, of course? Mr. Henry Absent, representing the interests of W. J. Gamble? And this gentleman is Admiral Swallow. Just see what you can do for us."

Mrs. Mallory was so struck by the altered demeanour of the hotel clerk, as he whipped the toothpick out of his

mouth and asked Mr. Absent politely to please wait a moment, that the name of Gamble did not stir any recollection in her and connect itself with the identity of the high-spirited young man whom Adam had once brought home to lunch.

Dismayed, almost frightened, she made her way vaguely out into the street, and began to search uncertainly for some other place where she might stay.

Some time later, after she had been turned away from three houses that offered rooms to rent, she found herself on a corner with her bag and her umbrella and without the least notion of what she ought to do next. She was hot and tired, and worn out by the dread in the back of her mind. Then, as if to add to her distresses, she perceived a disagreeably familiar face approaching her. It was Mrs. Giles, walking with a springy step, and beaming at some joke that she had no doubt just uttered to herself.

Mrs. Mallory drew herself up coldly, but Mrs. Giles, slowing down with timid hesitation, and looking at her quite wistfully, only asked:

"Is anything the matter? Have you lost something, maybe?"

Mrs. Mallory gazed at her sharply, and was surprised to realize that the eyes that were set in the finely wrinkled skin were altogether kind.

"I can't find a room anywhere," said Mrs. Mallory. And she added impulsively, throwing herself on the only friendliness she had thus far encountered: "I really don't know what to do."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Giles. "Is that all? I thought it was a toothache! Now you just come with me—I've found a dandy little place, and cheap as dirt, too. You can share my room if you like."

Mrs. Mallory gratefully, and ashamed of her former unchristian behaviour, inclined her head. The two middle-aged women walked down the street together.

CHAPTER TWELVE

AND INDEED, AFTER a cup of weak, lukewarm tea which Mrs. Giles extracted from their landlady after a salty wash-up in the porcelain sink that was installed in one corner of their bare room, and after a little humble reflection, Mrs. Mallory made up her mind that she even liked Mrs. Giles very much.

She decided that Mrs. Giles was undoubtedly a very quaint character. She was clearly capable, too, and probably a fool only in relationship with people. Her habit of never losing any opportunity for a pun, her wretched trick of distorting proverbs and presenting them hopefully as irresistible quips, her lack of all taste and dignity, and her almost ostentatious vulgarity were things that had to be put up with like the defects in a friend.

Mrs. Mallory surveyed her gravely, and forgave her everything. She was glad, too, of the information which Mrs. Giles had mysteriously managed to pick up, as it were, out of the air. Some faint tappings from the wrecked submarine had been detected only that morning, so it was certain that the men down there were still alive.

"As snug as a rug full of bugs," Mrs. Giles said with a desperate air of certainty, so that Mrs. Mallory saw at last how frightened and unhappy she was.

And Mrs. Giles went on to say that Commander Comfort was now due from Washington at any moment; and he would take care of everything. Hadn't Commander Comfort raised the *S-17* two years ago when everyone said it couldn't be done? Why, Commander Comfort could raise anything!

"So you see there's nothing to worry about, Mrs. Mallory. Take your Aunt Nelly's word for it, you and your Adam will be dancing an Irish jig together before forty-eight hours is over!"

But she struggled to keep the talk away from further mention of Adam, about whom Mrs. Giles seemed uncomfortably to know a great deal; and the only way she could

contrive this was to divert the conversation to Mrs. Giles' son instead.

Mrs. Giles seemed surprised that Mrs. Mallory did not know as much about Will as she knew about Adam. She explained proudly that Will was to be a doctor.

"A real one, you know, with all the trimmings. He's almost one already. He could begin to practise right away if he wanted to, I guess. She paused and her face went into its usual grimace. "Though goodness knows, where he is now, he'd have nothing to practise on but fishes!"

She went on chirping about him gladly. When he was successful—"cutting up rich people every day as easy as loaves of bread"—he was going to buy her her own house, with her own furniture in it, and china, and rugs—everything the best that money could buy.

"But if he'll only come back," she said in a suddenly small voice. "I wouldn't care about that any more—I wouldn't ask for anything!"

A little dazed at finding herself with such a companion in the solemn and miserable purpose upon which she had come, Mrs. Mallory, lingering only to dispatch a telegram over the house telephone to Cousin Daniel to tell him she had arrived and give him her address, started out to see the place where the submarine, with Adam in it, now lay buried beneath countless tons of water.

It was a fine afternoon, full of September warmth. The air was drenched with smells of salt, and a row of fishermen's cottages, softly coloured by the beatings of the wind and the sea, suggested the art works of innumerable talented amateurs. A little distance beyond, the street gaped open, and the beach and the glittering water could be seen.

Looking off through the sunlight, Mrs. Mallory made out an indistinct huddle of boats quite far out, but before she could strain her eyes to render the sight more intelligible, her attention was distracted by something else in the foreground.

This was the vociferous Jewish family who had so

affronted her on the train, and who had caused her to lose her self-control and her own dignity for a moment. They seemed to be engaged in enjoying a picnic-lunch on the sand. The younger children whooped and tumbled and screamed as they raced here and there. The fat uncle smoked his cigar placidly with a gorged look, his legs stuck out in front of him like two cylinders. The dim, small man who was the father brooded happily. The voluptuous mother sat with her mouth slightly opened. A girl slapped playfully at a young man. The rest were still busily eating. They were all having a splendid time.

"Just look at those people," said Mrs. Mallory faintly. "Isn't it dreadful that they should be allowed here at a time like this. I believe they're actually making a holiday out of it!"

"Oh, they know there's nothing to worry about," Mrs. Giles answered. "I suppose they think they might as well enjoy themselves while waiting."

At Mrs. Mallory's look of surprise, Mrs. Giles, who, indeed, seemed to know everything, added promptly:

"Their son is one of the boys, too. I spoke to them on the way down. Their name's Zacharias. Hasn't your son ever mentioned him? Will thinks a good deal of him, I can tell you!"

Mrs. Mallory grew more and more bewildered. She had seen a white-faced man or two on the train, and a woman weeping with a still, mournful persistence, whom she supposed to be parents or relatives of some of the men on board; but the attitude of this huge, vigorous Jewish family who seemed determined to make the most out of their trip, the detached efficiency of the mere representative of young Gamble's influential family, and the garrulous Mrs. Giles herself, with her imitation of a very bad professional comedian, all contrived to stun her. Were people really like this? And she began to feel that no matter how old one was, one never really knew anything.

They went on into the more thickly crowded streets of

the town, and Mrs. Giles at once discovered the way to the pier from which they could obtain the best view.

The crowd here was even denser. One stream of sightseers was slowly moving out with the expectant faces of people entering a freak show, while another stream was moving back with the disappointed faces of those who had seen it. On the planking that was built over spindly piles stood some fishing sheds, and here and there were pyramids of bleaching oyster shells. In some places nets were spread to the sun, and several fishermen's boats could be seen below, on the green, translucent water slowly rising and falling with the ground swell. Gulls soared everywhere, and seemed to be enjoying themselves too, as if they felt themselves part of the exciting convention.

At the far end of the pier, Mrs. Giles paused and pointed: "There!" she said.

Mrs. Mallory gazed across the water in the direction of the workstained finger. She could see the clump of assorted vessels from which floated thin sounds of unguessed activities. But as she stared, they blurred dizzily before her and she saw instead only the gaunt young face of Adam.

She thought of him now with an acuteness that tore her nerves. Only his conception and his birth had faded from her memory. They were disagreeable things that did not matter, mere causes of the main, powerful event. But the queerly attractive plane made by his cheekbones, the characteristics of his glance, the tones of his voice that constantly gave him away to her, and nearly told her what he was thinking—these she remembered now with feelings of unspeakable pain. She herself was Adam, she herself was down there in that blackness and horror. And suddenly she began to pray, with lips that moved soundlessly, and offered her soul to God for eternal torment, or whatever sacrifice might bribe and please Him, if Adam might be spared.

"What's that boat trying to do moving in on them now?" Mrs. Giles asked interestedly, when all at once she caught

sight of Mrs. Mallory's face. She put her arm quickly around her shoulders, but Mrs. Mallory only drew off, saying in a stifled voice:

"If you don't mind, I think I'll go. You stay—but I don't want to see any more."

She turned, and fearing that Mrs. Giles' lack of tact might make her decide to accompany her, she fled hastily.

That night Mrs. Mallory slept from exhaustion, and in the morning awoke feeling exhausted still. But Mrs. Giles, who had risen and gone out an hour earlier, came in to tell her with excitement that Commander Comfort was arriving this morning and was expected at the hotel before ten.

Mrs. Mallory dressed, and tried, not very successfully, to eat some breakfast, and then the two women made their way to the centre of the town.

Though it was early, a large crowd had already gathered in the dingy hotel lobby and was increasing every minute. Voices commingled to make a continuous buzzing sound, and Mrs. Giles constantly stretched her neck so that the shabby fur on her coat collar ruffled like plumage. At last she exclaimed excitedly:

"He's coming! Just hear them—he's coming all right!" Indeed the voices had grown abruptly louder, and everybody was now staring towards the doors. There was a perceptible movement in the crowd choking the entrance, and then a tall man in civilian clothes with an agreeable, perfectly serene expression entered the lobby accompanied by several Navy officers.

It could be seen at once why Commander Comfort was in charge. His features, while not handsome, had the attractive look that proceeds from excellent balance. He was a leader not because he knew more than anyone else, or was in any way even especially gifted or intelligent, but simply because he was calmly sure of himself. He was a leader because he had the personality of a leader.

As he now entered, he was immediately surrounded by reporters, and his casual smile, his unhurried way of

answering, increased the confidence inspired solely by his manner.

Mrs. Giles and Mrs. Mallory were too far away to hear what he was saying. But in the crowd, hemming him in, Mrs. Mallory's eyes made out here and there faces that, in the last twenty-four hours, had grown extraordinarily familiar: the faces of Mr. Absent and his cohesive friend, Admiral Swallow, directly in front of the Commander; and the faces of the Zacharias family, children and all, who were wriggling and squirming and emitting indignant sounds as they constantly sought to insinuate themselves closer to the great man.

From where they stood Mrs. Mallory and Mrs. Giles were unable to catch a word, and when, in a few moments, he was all through and had escaped into a private room, they looked at each other with disappointment.

But now, on all sides of them, loud argumentative talk burst out, full of authoritative declarations and accompanied by sage nods, earnestly shaken hands, and the occasional sounds of fists smacked into palms. Such terms as escape bells, pontoons, and grapnels, as turnbuckles, toggle bars, and spill pipes, as rolling chocks, pelican hooks and clapper valves were pronounced with accents of wisdom, and that obscure satisfaction which resides in the possession of any excluding, technical language.

Mrs. Giles halted before one group of Navy officers, and brightly asked what had happened, what he had said. She was informed that the method by which Commander Comfort proposed to raise the *K-13* was by means of huge naval derricks. Two of these, the property of a commercial dredging company down the coast, had already been requisitioned, and soon would be on their way here.

"And he says they'll be able to do it—he says they can do it in time?" Mrs. Giles asked in a sudden quaver of anxiety.

"Do it?" said a red-faced officer with his hat clapped on the side of his head. "Of course they'll do it—it's the

only way—I've been saying the same thing myself right along. Those derricks will have those men out of there by Sunday!"

He nodded vigorously, in spite of a murmur of dissent from some in the group around him. But the definiteness of his manner, the conviction in his dogmatic, belligerent voice, was heartening. Mrs. Giles looked at him with swimming eyes full of the pathos of trust.

Then her face puckered up, as if it were suddenly being withered, and some miserable joke she attempted to falter out was unable to conceal the fact that she had all at once begun to cry. It was Mrs. Mallory who this time became protective. She put her arm through Mrs. Giles', said, "There, there!" and began to lead her away, a moist, dilapidated figure.

Her own head was uplifted now, and she felt peaceful and deeply grateful like an invalid in convalescence. For she, too, believed the declaration of the truculent, red-faced officer. And in her heart she had not any doubt at all that it was her prayer that had particularly been answered.

Slow time went by, a day, and still another day, made up, minute by minute, of dreadful suspense.

The crowd on the fishing pier this afternoon was no longer large, for one of the first things that Commander Comfort had done was to achieve order by establishing restrictions. No one was allowed out here now who did not have actual business, or the excuse of a reasonable personal interest; everyone required a pass, and these had been issued to the Navy working crew in charge, to a selected handful of representatives of the press, and to those only who could claim either actual kinship, or some intimate relationship, with members of the crew of the *K-13*.

And today the suspense was at its height, for it was also nearing its end; the two great sea derricks were known to be plunging heavily up from their yard, and might be sighted at any instant. For their arrival everything had been

carefully made ready; the crews of the flotilla of vessels over the wreck had been working feverishly for the past two days with no pause at the coming of dark; diver after diver had gone down, several collapsing from the ailment called the bends, or shattered by long exposure in the icy depths; until finally cables and lines had been secured to the towing hooks and lifting-eyes of the sunken submarine; and though constantly weaker and more irregularly, from the interior of her hull, tappings like those of exhausted men could still faintly be heard. There was yet time, there must be that, though it was probable that some on board were already dead; and the eyes of the groups waiting on the pier kept staring at the empty, ironic horizon beyond the point, with expressions that were beseeching and frantic.

In the fresh offshore breeze tumbling the bay with white-caps, the fishing village resembled one of those seaside resorts of well-to-do people where regattas of graceful sloops and yawls are held at the end of each season, and yachting caps with club insignia, together with excellently cut white flannels, are a conventional male uniform.

And this suggestion was aggravated by Mr. Henry Absent with Admiral Swallow beside him at the outermost end of the pier in a costume that suggested something of the kind. Moreover, they were both provided with folding canvas chairs, and were smoking what appeared to be good cigars. They gazed approvingly towards the sea, as though it were something that existed solely to give them pleasure; and their manner said that from the ordinary mass of men they were separated as by a sheet of diamond-hard glass. Occasionally Mr. Absent swept the distance with a pair of German-made binoculars, and then handed them over to the retired admiral.

Mrs. Mallory had gazed at them once or twice, and then looked away with a snobbery of the spirit that even exceeded their certainty of worldly superiority. She, too, felt herself equally withdrawn, even though her party included poor, common Mrs. Giles who, under the stimulus

of excitement and nervous waiting, was now firing off whole salvos of wretched jokes with a strained, blank look in her own face as she uttered them.

She addressed many of her crazily unrelated remarks to Cousin Daniel, who had arrived that day on the noon train, looking stringier than ever in his black broadcloth suit. Quite unconsciously Mrs. Giles was displaying a kind of coquetry towards him which would have been touching, had it not also been embarrassing. Cousin Daniel occasionally turned his large, empty eyes upon her with the aspect of some surprised owl, studying the erratic habits of a picked, hungry, yet jauntily flippant sparrow.

The three of them could not see much of anything from where they sat, which was on some uncomfortable packing boxes that exuded the quintessences of catches of fish and oozings of spilled oil. But when they had arrived, this had been the only place available where they could sit down at all, and they had been told they might have to expect a long wait before the ponderous sea derricks appeared.

Scattered here and there were other groups, and occasionally someone waiting quite alone. A young woman who looked as if she had been neglected by something or someone was crouched by the pier's edge, and had both her arms locked around a stanchion in an embracing clutch, while her cheek was laid against it. She had been sitting like that without moving for several hours.

There were others, some young, some old, but nearly all were silent. Those who spoke, spoke irritably, as if all their nerves were on edge.

But there were exceptions even to that. The Zacharias family, who had dashed on ahead the moment the pier was opened, had seized for themselves the most advantageous post of observation at its tip. They, too, had had forethought and had brought some cushions along, and as usual seemed occupied by some excessive emotional uproar, and as usual to be eating during it. The younger children danced about, threw the tough ends of sour pickles at gulls, nearly fell off

the pier, and were either caught up with hugs and kisses of relief, or else had their ears boxed instead to an accompaniment of outraged screaming, with the utmost unexpectedness in both cases and for no comprehensible reason in either.

Some sailors moved about idly, coiling ropes and exchanging mutters behind their hands, under the direction of a junior officer. Reporters and newspaper workers lounged about in bored attitudes, or exchanged reminiscences of former assignments in lazy voices while they waited. A couple of inevitable games of poker were going on, with oyster shells weighing down cards against the flickings of the breeze.

Though for a long time everyone had been here like this, and telling themselves they must expect to wait endlessly, they nevertheless were tormented by the hope that they would not have to; and their eyes were weary from straining at the mocking vastness of open water, broken only now and then by the arrival of a dirty fishing boat making for the land with a sound of weak but rasping engines.

The sun, though still strong, was bound upon its descending march, and the sharp wind rose a little, growing colder. Some of the women in light, print dresses, waiting for an event which must affect their entire lives, shivered a little; only Cousin Daniel in his heavy suit welcomed the passing of the day's warmth.

In their impatience people got up frequently and changed their places, spoke to strangers with curiosity, and as promptly became disinterested. Even Henry Absent and his friend, Admiral Swallow, rose and strolled slowly up and down, like passengers taking a turn about the decks of a liner.

Mrs. Mallory was feeling faint from the strain and the lack of food, for she had been unable to carry a morsel to her mouth all that day. Her head had begun to ache, and her neck hurt, too, from the number of times she had futilely craned it, trying to peer around the fishing shed. Cousin Daniel had a resentful look; and though Mrs. Giles

was going as strongly as ever, she seemed to be carrying herself only on the reserve of her incredible nerves.

However, the Zacharias family appeared to have adjusted themselves sensibly to demands which could not be propitiated, and to a progress of time that could not be hastened by any man. The stout uncle lay back with a cap drawn over his eye, snoring heavily. One of the younger women was clasped, in the same soporific contentment, and with the same lack of any sensitiveness regarding public decorum, in the arms of a youth who was undoubtedly betrothed to her, and who combined without difficulty the alert look of a hawk with an altogether voluptuous expression. And even their resignation suggested a tension which lay heavily upon the fishing pier and all its occupants.

This tension was at last relieved by the sight of a Navy launch, putting out from the principal ship of the fleet anchored far out, and heading rapidly in their direction. They crowded together, staring at it as it approached. The motors cut off, it swayed and rocked, and bumped against the pilings. Commander Comfort climbed quickly up a crude fisherman's ladder. His face looked grim and impatient, and impatiently he waved off the reporters who immediately surrounded him, as he started for the town. One or two hopefully followed him, while some of the others, including Mr. Absent and the entire Zacharias family, tried to find out from the crew of the launch what was up, or if anything had happened. But they could learn only that Commander Comfort had gone ashore to telephone, but to whom or what about, none of the sailors knew.

Among the worn, anxious groups, various speculations began to mount, ranging from the most optimistic kind to the most pessimistic, according to the temperaments of the speakers. Mrs. Giles was sure everything was going to be all right now.

"He'd never have come ashore if it wasn't. Oh, no, it's all right now—right as your grandmother's false teeth!"

Mrs. Mallory sent her a distracted look. She still liked

Mrs. Giles, but she wished she would not talk quite so much, and with so lamentable a lack of taste.

But when presently Commander Comfort returned, his face as grim as ever, Mr. Absent managed this time to waylay him with the Admiral in tow, and Comfort, looking at them both irritably, gave a curt nod to whatever was said to him. Then, in front of the envious eyes of those unequipped with the magic of talismans, Mr. Absent and the Admiral went down the ladder with him into the launch. This broke into abrupt explosions, cast off, and began to return to the rescue fleet.

The Zacharias uncle lit a cigar as he watched this departure with shining eyes. He shook his head in admiration of Mr. Absent's talents.

"Smart felleh!" he said to no one in particular.

But now the optimists were heavily outweighed by the pessimists. The sombre expression on Commander Comfort's face, his impatient hurry, were not capable of any hopeful interpretation. It was impossible to know where the rumour sprang up among the watchers on the pier, but it was falsely confirmed by the statement that one of the crew of the launch had been responsible for it, and it ran with the swiftness of light from one end of the dock to the other. Something had happened to the sea derricks—their owners had not received the message in time—they had not even started as yet!

And as this lugubrious and shattering news grew in intensity, one of the Zacharias children, pointing out toward where the rest were no longer looking, asked shrilly:

"What's that, Poppa?"

A cry made up of hoarse sounds, of swift, exultant murmurs, blew the dead rumour away like smoke from a gun barrel. They were all staring, some with open mouths, some smiling weakly, some with incongruously tragic looks, at the open water around the point. There, swaying like the tall masts of schooners, their steel frames at this distance seeming no larger than the filaments inside an electric bulb,

could be seen unmistakably two huge derricks, towed on doggedly by a squat, black tug.

The suspense, the torment imposed by impatience, was cracked like a broken stick. All at once everyone was talking at the same time. Mrs. Giles was smiling weakly, and at last in all the uproar became silent. Cousin Daniel was smiling, too, with an air of not knowing at what he was smiling. The little Zacharias girl who had noticed the derricks jumped up and down yelling: "I seen them first, I seen them first, I seen them first!" and had to be smacked into another kind of howling to make her stop.

Mrs. Mallory found herself addressing a stranger, saying anxiously: "It won't be long now, will it? They'll get them out right away, won't they?" when with a start she perceived she was speaking to the Zacharias uncle himself.

And he, taking the cigar out of his mouth, said genially, "Sure, lady, sure!" and actually patted her on the shoulder with fingers set like wooden pivots in his stubby hand.

All eyes were now turned to the sea reaches, watching the snail-like pace of the derricks which exasperatingly never seemed to come any nearer. It was like watching the hands of a clock, or trying to mark a flower growing. And yet, at last, the derricks were suddenly closer, grown ponderous and formidable, and slowly veering toward the point itself. Tiny figures of men could be seen on the flat decks of their supporting barges, while their girders towered up with something solemnly pompous about them. They came swaying closer, as impressive as the battering rams of an ancient war. Their topheaviness was such as to make it seem a miracle from instant to instant that they did not capsize. And in spite of the fine weather, the high seas just around the point made this barrier the most difficult and precarious part of their trip.

Then all at once something happened, something that was instantaneously recognized, as swiftly as an audience recognizes an actual mishap on the stage of a theatre. The derricks were advancing no more. The tug towing them had

begun to rock idly on the choppy water with the towing cables slackened behind her in descending arcs. She gave an impression of peering ahead at the troubled water with a hesitant concern. Then while the anxious people on the pier stared with their hearts in their mouths, the tug began resolutely to turn in a wide sweep, returning toward the calmer water behind the shelter of the point. Obediently the great derricks followed; they began, unbelievably, to retreat.

For a moment no one on the pier could face what was happening. Were they actually turning back!—turning back because of timidity about that rough passage of water? Surely this was only some manoeuvre to jockey themselves into a desirable place for salvage operations! A wild babble broke out, which deepened into the acceptance of despair and terror. Suddenly a woman shrieked. A man began to curse in a deep low voice, made frightening by monotony. Tragic eyes, looking all about seeking for assurance elsewhere, saw only tragic eyes looking back.

Mrs. Giles' face suggested the moment of hideous collapse into lunacy. It was white and sick, but across it there kept flickering off and on, with no more meaning than a nervous twitch, her idiotic, comic grimace.

Louder than all the rest of the outcries was the wailing that now proceeded from the Zacharias family. They shook fists in imprecation, or lifted their heads to the sky, imploring a God to strengthen them no further by the discipline of suffering. Down to the smallest child they had suddenly burst into a sort of wailing. Oriental demonstration of grief.

Mrs. Mallory alone was perfectly still. But in the hubbub going on, in the confusion produced in her own mind by the unfamiliar and shocking incidents of the last few days, in the knowledge that she could not as yet even take into her consciousness that her son was lost, gone down to death in torment and meaninglessness, her contained and austere mind broke its bonds at last. She decided in her toppling philosophy that God did not exist.

As she affirmed this, she addressed Him in her heart, and

told Him she repudiated Him for His indifference to her torture.

Her eyes had been locked shut, but the sound of someone else's grief now burst against her hearing close by. She opened her eyes and saw Cousin Daniel. She was then aware in a remote, unconcerned way that she had been mistaken in supposing it was a sound of grief she had heard.

He was now gazing toward her excitedly, and holding out with a trembling hand a shell he had just picked up at his feet.

"Look! Look! An actual *cassis tritonis*—in perfect condition! And to find it here of all places!"

Then she saw that he, too, did not know what he was saying, and was righting the horror of reality with the only weapon he had.

In the darkness of her close room, Mrs. Mallory painfully awoke. For a moment she supposed she had awakened naturally, and she began to fumble her way slowly up to the levels of consciousness. But all at once she was arrested by a sibilant sound, and the realization penetrated her torpid brain like a dart, telling her that someone was whispering to her. She lifted herself up partly, said, "What? What is it?" in a voice at once muffled and alert, and then managed to make out the wrinkled, bird-like features of Mrs. Giles bent over her.

"It's all right, it's all right!" said Mrs. Giles in an excited hiss. "Oh, you must get up! You'll be so glad! Just wait till I tell you——"

And incoherently, presenting everything in the wrong order, repeating herself like a drunkard, and punctuating her gasped-out sentences with gulps of awful laughter, she acquainted Mrs. Mallory with the wonderful news. Some time during the night, with the rising of the moon and on the slack tide, the water had grown still as glass; then the two sea derricks, that had merely taken shelter around the point, had returned and successfully crossed the bar. Now,

with dawn not far away, they were about to begin their attempts at rescuing the *K-13*.

"If you'll hurry and get dressed, we can go to the pier together right away," Mrs. Giles went on, jumping up to turn on the harsh, unshaded light. "I don't believe another soul even knows yet. Of course they will, fast enough! But I couldn't sleep and was sitting in a lunchroom by myself, crying into my coffee so hard it wasn't fit to drink, when a man came in and brought the news. *That* was better than a slap in the belly with a wet fish, I can tell you!"

In the midst of her ecstatic feelings of deliverance, Mrs. Giles was now aware of a strange look that had appeared on Mrs. Mallory's face. Prepared for anything proper to the circumstances—a fit of wild weeping, say, or even a dead faint—she was rendered baffled and uncertain by Mrs. Mallory's profound stillness, the rigid and tormented set of her mouth, and the haggard despair in her eyes.

"What's the matter?" she stammered confusedly. "Aren't you—aren't you coming?"

The woman who had for a moment denied her God shook her head.

"But—but don't you want to see them bring her up? Don't you want to be there when he——"

Mrs. Mallory cast upon her a look so full of longing, of inarticulate, unhappy things, that Mrs. Giles' mouth fell open and she was unable to finish her sentence.

"I have lost the right," said Mrs. Mallory as if to herself. "I must be punished for my doubt and my weakness. There is nothing I can ever do—nothing——"

Her own voice drifted away like the voice of an invalid. She did not look at Mrs. Giles again. Presently Mrs. Giles, with a puzzled, scared look tiptoed to the door, and closed it softly behind her.

Outside, the first greyness was beginning to filter into the vacant streets. Nothing could be heard save the irregular sound of Mrs. Giles' turned-over heels on the pavement, and the delicate slapping of the water along the beach.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IT WAS ALMOST noon before the final signal was given. Commander Comfort on the rescue ship *Hawk* was worn fine. Indeed, he had not slept for several nights, and now that his theories had reached the moment of their test, even his own assurance had faltered.

The morning had been a hard one. A couple of men had been badly injured in the feverish hurry to complete the task. But the mighty derricks, straddling the calm water, were in position at last, their cables shackled to the wreck, and all the pumping connections made ready.

Commander Comfort gazed all around with a dull stare. Then in a hoarse voice he called his orders from the bridge through a megaphone. For a moment there was continued stillness. The next instant the startling roar and clatter of the heavy-duty engines broke upon the glittering white day. The spirals of the descending cables grew taut, and the engines coughed and rattled as the tension increased, while the chattering sound of the manifold pumping operations mingled with this din.

The cables gave a loose jolt as they took hold, instantly became taut again, and began to wind upwards with shrieking noises. Commander Comfort looked on gravely. The palms of his hands were sweating. Upon the resistance of the huge strands of twisted wires depended everything. They were being subjected to an intolerable strain. Everyone in the entire rescue fleet was now crowded against the rails and gunwales of their various craft. All discipline had relaxed. Yet no one spoke. The grimy crews on the two derricks oiled their engines and stared down with speculative glances. Interminably, the racket went on, while the cables, never ceasing their threatening sounds of intense strain, flattened slowly upon their drums.

Then with the abruptness of a rifle shot, the orderly surface of the water began to boil and seethe. Up through this fearful welter there burst with its grotesque of curiosity

the twisted periscope of the *K-13*. While they all rigidly watched, without breathing, as though fearing to break a spell, the battered superstructure came crashing out of the water like a fist. The engines of one of the derricks began to fade sickingly. But all at once it found strength again, and with an immense swaying movement the entire back of the shark-like monster could at last be seen dripping in the sunlight. The derrick engines became abruptly silent with an effect of violence.

Now Comfort began to shout orders wildly. Other cables and chains were made fast to the captive monster, until at last men saw the *K-13* could not sink again, and the ordeal was over. Taut bodies slumped into the relief of looseness, and everyone was suddenly smiling.

The waiting launch, with its crew of artisans, medical officers, and hospital apprentices, pushed off instantly from the *Hawk* and made fast to the submarine. Some men with sledges and extension wrenches clambered aboard and began hastily to unbolt the escape hatch in the conning tower. It gave with a screeching sound, and emitted a volume of foul, dead air. Into the blackness that gaped below, the doctors and the apprentices now carefully descended.

For a long time there was no sign of anything. The still water and the quiet sky were not more still and quiet than the chained submarine. The watchers on the decks of the flotilla never took their eyes away from it for a second. Cameramen, poised at the rails of the press boat, were aiming for possible shots.

They had their opportunity at last. From the battered conning tower, a couple of apprentices, bearing a stretcher, appeared abruptly and lowered their burden gingerly into the launch. As they returned to the hatch, still another stretcher and its cargo came up. For nearly twenty minutes, this went on, then the doctors themselves reappeared, and the boatload of all those who had survived on the *K-13* pushed off.

Commander Comfort received the reports in silence. The

press boat hovered alongside and picked up his information. That evening every paper in the country was to carry the news that nine men had been rescued alive, and to list their names thus:

Lieut. R. B. Brale, C. O., Minneapolis, Minn.
Ens. H. Dycer, Washington, D. C.
Ch. Mach. Mate A. Zacharias, New York City
T. Cuff, Jr., cook first class, Sarasota, Fla.
W. Giles, electrician first class, Boston, Mass.
J. Dominick, torpedoman second class, Tulsa, Okla.
J. Gamble, quartermaster second class, Lenox, Mass.
A. Mallory, oiler second class, Brooklyn, N. Y.
F. Black, seaman first class, Bangor, Me.

And this handful of survivors, wrapped in blankets, and with eyes glazed by stupor, were now being landed as swiftly as possible on the pier, where a couple of ambulances stood waiting.

The small, desperate crowd that had been roped off, watched silently as man after man was lifted up. Brale was the first to appear. His head was skeletal and rolled from side to side as if the neck were broken. After him came Timothy Cuff, and then Hamilton Dycer, whose eyes had that piercing, contracted look of someone in a state of abject funk. He did not seem to know where he was.

Julian Gamble appeared next. His bloodless mouth was parted in a grin as meaningless as a hole. He was at once borne to the smaller, private ambulance, escorted by Henry Absent and Admiral Swallow, bending solicitously over him.

Julian's eyes fell upon them with weary indifference. He muttered in a faint voice that carried still the suggestion of his contemptuous spirit.

"Well, well. . . . Old Pussyfoot, the fixer! . . . How are you, Pussyfoot?"

But it was not necessary for Mr. Absent to answer, for Julian had collapsed into unconsciousness. The private

ambulance, with Absent and the admiral as passengers, stole off immediately on its cushioned springs.

Meanwhile the other general ambulance was rapidly filling up. Alfred Zacharias, whose wasted face carried an abused, resentful expression, was now being borne towards it. A confused sound of shrieks and rejoicing cries greeted his appearance from a cluster of people straining their eyes from behind the ropes. He turned his head slowly there, but his expression did not change.

Then Will Giles was lifted up. He looked very still and sad. He, too, heard a greeting in a familiar voice like a crazy chirp:

"Hello, Neptunel!"

He tried to wave his hand, but found he could not.

Adam came up the last of all. But for him there was no welcoming voice or face to mark his return to the world. He did not care; he did not care right now about anything. Idly he opened and shut his weak fingers as if trying to clasp a handful of the sunlight blazing down upon him. He did not want to think about anything just yet. It was enough to be back in the delicious healing sensations of sweet air and golden light. It was enough to know that he was going to live, that he was not going to be wasted, thrown away, with all the infinite, unguessed possibilities of his youthful promise.

PART II
1922

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"THIS IS THE place," Giles said, looking from the crumpled list in his hand to the big apartment building of solid, grey stone with a striped awning in front of it.

His mother smiled broadly, as if determined to be cheerful not only about distress, but about nothingness itself. Still, it could not be said that she was comfortable—one of the qualities of nothingness. It was a sweltering August afternoon, the streets of Boston suggested the hot grooves of a gigantic waffle iron, and Mrs. Giles had become miserably sticky in the cheap, heavy suit which served to keep her a little warmer in Winter at the cost of tormenting her all Summer: every part of her skin now itched under its delicate but ceaseless scratchings. Her feet ached and were swollen from much walking on the hard, blistering pavements.

She, too, stared at the building before them that shimmered in the heat, making it seem to have a trembling outline. Will's face was set with a portentous frown as though he were trying to frighten this inanimate monster, by attempting to convey, perhaps, an aspect of formidable character—an impersonation likely to deceive no one. But obediently Mrs. Giles looked very solemn, also.

Although it was barely three years since the Armistice, Giles now looked much older. It was strange how swiftly the bright, sharp era of the war had lost colour and reality, had become all at once old-fashioned and uninteresting. Most of its heroes, who, it had been proclaimed, would be remembered forever, had been forgotten already. The Armistice had finished all those wretched lies; and the half-hysterical, half-maudlin crowds everywhere that night when peace came, seemed to express chiefly a passionate relief that the war, which had killed so many, was at any rate definitely going to spare them.

Giles, who had expected that his entire lifetime would be occupied by considerations relating to the war, was astonished to realize he no longer thought about it at all.

And stranger still was the way in which those deep friendships, which association at that time had produced for him, had so completely been discarded.

He had heard from Alfred Zacharias once, but that was only in answer to a letter of his own. Zacharias was now teaching in the municipal college in New York where he himself had been educated. He wrote very fully and bitterly about the cynical activities of the current administration; he seemed to be quite upset about this. At the end of his diatribe he had only space left to offer briefly and contemptuously the astonishing information that Adam Mallory had actually become a clergyman. It was that experience in the submarine which was responsible, of course. Zacharias said he had not seen him for over a year, but he understood he was married and living in New York State somewhere. As for Julian Gamble, he was away, as usual, in Paris, or on the Riviera, or in some such place. "Spending the money his father has stolen from the workers and the poor," Alfred did not fail to add.

But Giles had had little chance to think about his fellow survivors of the *K-13*, for his own existence since that time had been too disagreeably engrossing to allow much room for other thoughts.

As he now surveyed the heavy, opulent, and forbidding building as if he supposed it to be examining him instead, he nodded as if reaching a decision. Then, squaring his shoulders and walking on his heels, he advanced, followed by his mother's short, bird-like steps. A doorman in a gold-laced uniform intercepted them, and hearing what it was they wished, went to fetch the superintendent and renting agent.

This man appeared from a doorway in the rear of the dim foyer. He dangled some keys on a ring, rattling them with an effect of menace, and his smooth-shaven face, thin, plastered hair, and pin-stripe suit gave him the aspect of a type as definite as a race. His bright, shallow eyes were full of the cowardice of those whose only protection is the law; and these fell upon the mother and the son, ripped up the

dinginess of their clothes and appearance as if with a knife, and became at once contemptuous with indifference.

As if reluctantly performing a very great favour, as if utterly refusing for a moment to believe they needed to be taken seriously, he let them into an apartment in the front of the building. Lighting a cigarette and jangling his keys still, he himself looked about at the bare walls and floors as if he had never seen the place before.

A little ill-at-ease at this familiar species of hostility, without being conscious of what it was that oppressed them, Will and Mrs. Giles walked guiltily through the apartment as if admitting they were only pretenders and had no real right to be there.

Most of the rooms were dark and lifeless, but they immediately suggested the purpose which Will Giles was seeking: in an instant, without much imagination, it was easy to metamorphize the bleak, newly-painted walls, and hardwood floors with their coverings of scattered newspapers, into the sort of doctor's office that could offend no one by its novelty.

Beginning with a stern, deep tone that petered out in a sound like entreaty, Giles inquired:

"What are you asking for this?"

"Hundred and seventy-five," said the agent, without removing his cigarette, and accenting his answer with a clatter of his keys as though warning that he would not put up with any protest.

Giles winced, and his mother wet her colourless, sensitive lips. It was like everything else they had seen so far that was also in the least possible—a great deal more than they could pay. Eighty dollars a month, at the very most ninety, was what their carefully considered budget, worked out so earnestly on many a long evening, had apportioned for office rent. And even with this limitation, it would be a race with time if patients did not appear in sufficient numbers by the end of the first half year, for by then all their resources would be gone.

The thing to do was to go immediately, of course; it was a waste of nervous force to look any further or to stay a moment more. But the apartment-house superintendent's assumption of an immense, indefinable superiority made Giles carry on a pretence out of injured vanity.

"Hm! I suppose you'd redecorate if I took it? Also I'd want the partitions changed in that rear room—the one I'd use for my office."

"The doctor is very, very particular about things like that," Mrs. Giles obligingly exclaimed.

The agent uttered an insulting sound that was technically a laugh. His voice informed them that he knew they were poor pretenders.

"Redecorate? We wouldn't think of doing it over again! We might be willing to let you do it at your own expense—subject, of course, to our approval. And in that case we'd want a two-year lease and some sort of guarantee. We've had too many unfortunate experiences recently."

The tone, full of the joylessness of the average enemy of man, grated upon Giles' heart; and a burst of unexpected anger took command of his more timid brain.

"I had no idea I was talking to one of the owners of this place!" he said in a voice heavy with sarcasm and smouldering with an excess of rage out of all proportion to the affront.

The agent for the first time looked at him quickly, and his entire manner altered. With suddenness he cast away the aloofness which expressed his disdain.

"I didn't say I was one of the owners," he mumbled sullenly, uneasy at a feeling that he was dealing with someone so disorderly as to knock him down. "After all, I have to act for their interests. I just get my orders like everybody else."

And this immediate collapse made Giles feel just as suddenly ashamed and foolish at his burst of temper, so that instead of pursuing his advantage, he began to pretend that he had not actually shown any belligerence, that it

was all a mistake anyway. He became nervously jocular, and laughing at nothing, even ended by slapping the agent on the back with an air of propitiating him, and now accepting without further defiance his claims to superiority.

"Well, of course, of course! We're all like that—under orders. I'm just one jump ahead of the sheriff myself—regular habit now! I used to be a newsboy in this town, you see. And I guess the place is all right as it is. Anyway, I'll think it over and let you know."

The words came out meaninglessly, with an eager apology in their intonation, and gradually the agent grew confident again, even more supercilious than before, as if at a victory. He smiled grandly with an effect of sneering.

"Yes, the doctor will let you know," said Mrs. Giles. "Of course, if he comes here, though, he'll want it put in the lease that you'll be sick. That will be one way of getting the rent—you can take it out in trade!"

The building agent looked at her coldly, but made no reply. He swung the key as if to conclude a wearisome interview. And Giles and his mother, repeating several times the purport of what they had already said, escaped awkwardly to the street. They walked very briskly in an effort to put the neighbourhood behind them as quickly as possible, and to impress everyone with the fact that they were very busy people, bound toward an important destination, though the truth was they had not the slightest idea of where they were now going.

Giles was silent, and his silence had the quality of a statement. He was thinking with irritation of the way his mother constantly referred to him in the presence of strangers as "the doctor." He wished she would not do that! He himself was proud and almost incredulous at the possession of what seemed to him an impressive distinction. Often in private, he considered with glowing feeling that he could now actually call himself Dr. Giles. He was somebody in the world, he had come so far from the ragged

days of his boyhood. The shadowy future was preceded by whispers of itself in his imagination which charmed him, though they were also a little embarrassing. "For God's sake, get a doctor!" "I'm a doctor, what's the trouble here?" And then a sudden attentive silence, and a lane of staring faces through which he passed with a slight frown. Or else, perhaps, another scene—the siren of a police motorcycle, and the screech of his own abruptly applied brakes, then his jocularly cool voice: "You're quite right, officer, I *have* been speeding. An emergency case, however. My name is Dr. Giles. Just see me through the traffic, will you please?" Or again, a mere telephone conversation blandly spoken. "Will you kindly reserve two tickets in the name of Giles and leave my name at the box office—Dr. William Giles. Yes, that is correct."

But his mother's awe at his elevation, that innocently expected an equal awe from others, was so publicly displayed as to declare the obscurity of his beginnings and make him feel like a fool. She never let the word slip with the easy casualness that might have made it effective, but completely circumvented this by announcing it as with a trumpet.

They walked on dismally through the burning afternoon. Mrs. Giles was now not only perspiring steadily, and in steady torment under the itching of her cheap suit; she was so tired as to be nearly exhausted. All day they had been consulting advertisements, tramping street after street, and examining apartments with a view to finding a suitable office. And this endeavour had been going on for some time previously—almost three weeks, in fact—so that now Mrs. Giles was confused by so many different addresses and neighbourhoods, such varying rentals and specifications, all jumbled together in her head, that she could no longer keep any of them separate.

She had thrown herself entirely on Will's judgment, hoping that something would please him, and she could then chime in enthusiastically no matter what it was. Indeed,

she knew already just what she would say, the tone in which she would express her enormous satisfaction in a choice she would pretend was hers, too.

But he was angry at her at this moment, she realized. And though she seldom said anything tactful whenever she opened her mouth, she had now and then the tact to remain silent. She wished, though, that she knew what the trouble was, so she could apologize immediately. She would have been glad to blame herself, whether right or wrong, for she was too feminine to think principles mattered or to take anything seriously except personal emotions. But perhaps, she decided, he was only tired, and disappointed, and cross. Men were like that. She was very sorry for men.

Their steps had gradually led them down Beacon Hill in the direction of the Common. The colour of the grass was soothing in the glare, and some of the benches were pleasantly shaded by trees.

"Maybe we could sit down and—and think things over," Mrs. Giles ventured feebly.

Will did not answer, but accepted the suggestion at once by steering toward the nearest bench. He dropped into it with an expression at once incongruously haughty and brooding on his good-natured features. Mrs. Giles sat down gingerly in her hot suit, and meekly folded her hands in her lap. She wondered how long it would be before he stopped being angry with her.

But Will was not even thinking of her now. It was at himself he had gradually become angry. The trivial incident of his encounter with the supercilious renting agent had depressed him. It seemed to him like an instance of many things he did all wrong. Why hadn't he, at the statement of that preposterous rent, simply turned his back and walked away without bothering to utter a word?

It would have been a fine answer. But to have been weak enough in the first place to have cared about that insignificant man's opinion, then to have lost his temper with a bang of abruptness, and finally to have shown repentance

for this, too, in frightening haste—what a parade of docility and abasement these actions had formed!

Yes, why hadn't he gone at once without answering? Or done something else that surpassed even this in belittlement? And he began to wonder what would have been better; and forgetting his dejection, and even his whereabouts, lost himself voluptuously in the same battles of imagination.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Giles was looking peacefully about her. Not far away, a man in shapeless clothes was lying on the grass with a newspaper under his head. He had a dead look, like the photograph of a victim of a battle. Up the hill at a little distance five schoolgirls were taking pictures of each other with loud squeals and shrieks of protest and delight. It was plain that these sounds were in themselves a kind of language that had nothing to do with the words they carried. Mrs. Giles gazed at the group with a smile of tenderness. Poor things! They would learn soon enough that there was not much to laugh about; it was good for them to be happy while they could. In front of her, various people passed, sauntering or hurrying along. It was interesting to study them: an Irish nursemaid with a baby; then two well-dressed, and probably quite rich young men; after that a very old couple with country faces; next some rowdy small boys, threatening and taunting each other; and after them a fireman; and then another nursemaid, coloured this time. As she watched, Mrs. Giles' smile deepened. She felt the greatest good-will toward them all. It was lovely to be alive. And surely life had been very generous to her. Who else had so wonderful a son?

For he was wonderful, she felt with the simplest of convictions; even his faults were wonderful. Her heart hurt her, thinking of his goodness. Not a single bad habit marred his sweetness, not liquor, or wicked girls, a gambling, or any other frightening thing. And he had the endearing stupidity of masculinity. How she could have loved him if she had not been his mother! Would it be really possible for him to desert her for someone else on such terms, someone who

might not properly appreciate him? But surely that would not be for a long time, for he was devoted to her, he was deeply concerned about her, he was desperately anxious to make her happy with money and luxuries, never guessing that his longing to do that had made her happy already. And above all—for Mrs. Giles had her vanity, too—she exulted in the thought that, though he often frowned or moved uncomfortably at her jokes, now and then, when he was in the right humour, he would be literally convulsed by them. It kept her always trying. When occasionally she had success, and saw him double up until he wiped the tears weakly from his eyes, Mrs. Giles experienced the peculiar, sad satisfaction of an artist.

She glanced furtively at him now to see whether his mood had veered yet. He looked worn, she thought. It was the year before last that had done that to him. He had not recovered yet. Not even the stroke of unexpected luck that had come to them had been able to erase the memory of that year.

This was when Will had completed his course, and scraped through his examinations by the skin of his teeth. He had then begun his internship in the big general hospital, and that meant two years before he could set up practice. And how was he actually to do that? Where was the money to come from, they both secretly wondered. Meanwhile, though he received the nominal fee of an interne, he could no longer spare the time for those petty capabilities and ingenuities by which he had managed to keep a little money trickling in all during his harassed medical course. No, there was no longer any opportunity for the intermittent, part-time jobs of many varieties that had previously just barely kept them going.

He was thus too gnawed by private worry to take much part in the activities of the other internes. They were a rowdy, carefree lot, and alternated between accounts of a succession of hectic but quite ordinary sexual adventures, and intense, wrangling discussions of the various cases to which

they had been assigned. And though Giles was popular enough in the fashion of an amiable butt, he remained among them almost a solitary. Thinking mainly of how to keep alive did not give him much chance for levity or companionship. He was too poor to afford even the commodity of friendship.

In all this struggle Mrs. Giles had recklessly taken the principal burden of their support upon herself. In due course she managed to secure a position as saleswoman in a second-rate department store. The hours were long and the salary shocking. But she was grateful for the work. And she felt quite sick and bewildered the day she had mysteriously been fired. She could not understand it, for she had served the store as loyally as if it had been her own, and always tried to brighten up the customers with jokes, no matter how tired and downhearted she herself felt.

They had been living then in a dingy rooming-house on the outskirts of the city. Soon, at the thought of their long-unpaid rent, they trembled under the constant terror of eviction. And one evening, indeed, returning from a fruitless search for work, Mrs. Giles found their door padlocked against them. That night they slept on the floor in an upper hall. In the darkness and the cold, Mrs. Giles whispered facetious things that made Will shake hysterically as he stifled his painful laughter.

However, leaving their few possessions behind, of which nothing remained anyway that could still be pawned, they found rooms above a grocery store and credit for a month, while Will strove without much luck to relieve the grocer's epileptic daughter.

Although familiarity with privation had been their experience always, their difficulties in this period were aggravated by the ironic need of superior pretences. Often, Will, gravely reading a newspaper on his way to the hospital, with only a couple of nickels compressed under the bunched handkerchief in his pocket, would look up with dignity and glance at the other passengers, wondering if any

of them suspected they had a pauper in their midst, wondering, too, perhaps, if any of them were impostors like himself.

He bitterly doubted it. He was a doctor, the member of a learned and respected profession, and he was poorer than the poorest clerk or labourer—a doctor who had been forced to sleep on a hall floor like a tramp, before being evicted from a sordid rooming-house.

It was at this pass that Mrs. Giles grotesquely undertook the invention of an old friend at whose home she pretended to call nearly every day and take tea. She described these visits with glittering eyes, the little frosted cakes she had eaten, and once a whole plate of sausages and eggs together with hot biscuits and honey, when Will, who at least got his own meals at the hospital, came home dog-tired.

But she grew constantly thinner, and in the end Will saw through her story. She wanted to die at the look of shame and hatred in his eyes. It was as though he hated her for being the cause of his shame. She was wretched too, at the thought of how many things he himself needed. His one serge suit had a dreadful, greasy shine in places. He was a young man, yet already worn from self-denial. In her anguish she wished she knew how to steal. She was surprised that she was not shocked at such thoughts, but instead should wickedly exult in them.

And then when things could not possibly have grown more insufferable, a miracle had occurred, just showing you, Mrs. Giles said, looking back on times when she had been able to afford such things, that the movies weren't so crazy after all. It was exactly the way it had happened to Madge Bellamy in that picture where she was just about to throw herself off the cliff.

For Mrs. Giles came into an inheritance. She had certainly not expected anything of the sort, which made it all the more wonderful. Her only brother, Ed, who had quarrelled with her furiously on the occasion of her marriage to the dead factory foreman, had refused to see her afterward or even write to her. Mrs. Giles had heard nothing of him for

years. She knew only that he had settled in a small village in Vermont where he had a store of some kind—hardware or something like that. But now he, himself, had suddenly died.

The letter from the lawyers had traced her with difficulty, but had found her at last. Ed must have been as surprised by his own death as she was, for he had left no will. And he was a bachelor.

Giles borrowed some money from one of the other internes, and with the greatest excitement, he and his mother took the train to Vermont. It was in the Spring of the year, and the air was delicate, cold, and pure, when toward twilight they got off at the depot of the shabby little town.

But there was something friendly about the settlement with its plain shops and homely frame houses piled together along the bank of a river, and the green hills going up in a tumble all around. The people who lived here had eyes full of calm and innocent self-satisfaction, and the completest indifference as to what went on in the world beyond their mountains. Mrs. Giles looked hopefully at their faces, and thought she saw something friendly there. They looked back frankly in return, without humility and without malice, and she was startled to think that in time they might actually come to like her.

In the morning, fresh with the crystalline, abounding air, she discovered what she had fallen heir to, and could not believe her good fortune. In the bank, Ed had left deposits of nearly two thousand dollars, and although his hardware store was only leased, the stock of this, too, had considerable value—plows and farm tools, paint and chains, and a hundred other miscellaneous supplies stuffed into dusty drawers and piled on shelves in the dark loft overhead. And down the street, just where the town struck out into the open country, was Ed's house itself, a strange home for a bachelor, so big it was. It was a sedate old house with a comfortable look, filled with unpretentious furnishings that had grown agreeable from much living with them.

Mrs. Giles could feel her heart beating so loudly she was afraid she might be going to die from excitement. In the midst of her exultation, she did not neglect to wipe a tear away in memory of poor obstinate Ed, who had been so good to her. She was careful not to remind herself that if Ed had had any idea he was going to die, he would certainly have provided a will to prevent any of these things from falling into her hands.

But they were now just as certainly hers, and a lifetime of poverty had made her believe there was no other really serious evil. And she loved the little town instantly, its stores, churches, and neighbourly, complacent people, the farmers driving in and greeting each other with the affectation of scorn that was their country humour. Then, completing her happiness, she had had pointed out to her the only doctor in town, a man so old as to look as if he needed a doctor himself.

Why, all their troubles were over! The house would serve wonderfully for a combination office and home, when Will had finished his internship. Mrs. Giles had so many delightful things to think about, she even grudged having to fall asleep that night. She wandered through the big, gloomy rooms of Ed's house all next morning, allowing nothing to escape her feminine observation. She examined the curtains and the mattresses and the cheap oak furniture with tremulous eagerness. The possession of all these riches refused to lose its wild novelty.

Yes, altogether enchanting was the suggestion of what life for her here might be like. The house was not just a house; it stood on considerable acreage, and had been a farm once. Mrs. Giles saw an opportunity for keeping a cow, raising chickens, and having her own vegetable garden with flowers, too. And on the hill that rose abruptly in the rear was a grove of maple trees that in the spring of the year gave sap that could be made into actual maple syrup.

These prospects seemed to touch some hidden, sensitive nerve in Mrs. Giles. She belonged naturally to the life of

farms and small communities, and had only been diverted to the city existence for which she had no adaptability. Her blood knew she was home. She breathed in feelings of grandeur mingled with the humblest gratitude.

Then on the third day, with many confusing papers signed and witnessed, she suddenly noticed with the effect of a blow that Will's face wore a persistent frown. Her mind leaped to an intolerable conclusion.

He did not like it here! He actually did not want to live here! She was dumbly, miserably certain that that was what that look said. She began to try to explain this inconceivable thing to herself. How could anybody not be entranced by all this? Ah, he was too ambitious, that was it; he was not content to be just a country doctor!

Mrs. Giles did not hesitate an instant, but threw away her happiness as if with both hands. She had not said much so far, for with so many things to exclaim over she had been too overwhelmed to be articulate. And now she began to disparage everything—the town, the people in it, the limitations imposed by this isolation, the clumsy bigness of the old house that would be too much work and expense to run. With every word she experienced a stabbing sensation not unlike a consciousness of treachery.

She watched Will anxiously, hoping for at least one denial, the barest protesting murmur, but he agreed vigorously with everything. Her heart sank and all hope left her. With an appearance of satisfaction Will said that since she felt that way the only thing to do was to sell everything as quickly as possible and waste no time in getting back to Boston. He assured her she could leave it all to him. He would take care of everything. And indeed he worked with a peculiar, almost frantic speed, as if hurrying with impatience. The very next day he closed with an offer for the stock and good-will of the hardware store. It was a bad offer, but he explained that it might be a long time before they had any other, and it was just as well to get rid of things when they could.

Then an auction was arranged for the furnishings of the house. Mrs. Giles read one of the printed bills that announced this. Her expression was quite flat and blank. Yet she thought with a miserable heart how splendid the list sounded: "... including rugs; pictures; dressers; excellent quartered-oak dining-room set; fine, leather-upholstered parlour suite; beds, single and double; sofas; clocks; book-cases; books; mirrors; odd table; chairs; curtains, bedspreads, blankets, dishes, glassware; silver; stoves; large new ice-box; aluminium kitchen ware; some farm equipment, and many other articles."

Will had decided to reserve one thing only, an old car of his uncle's, a roadster of a kind that had already ceased to be manufactured. It stood up very high and straight, on huge thin tires. It had four speeds and a noisy chain drive, and belched a sickening blue smoke inside its torn isinglass side-curtains when in motion. But they could use that in Boston, he said, take trips in it now and then, and later on he would need a car anyway for his professional calls.

The heartbreaking day of the auction arrived at last. In the fine weather most of the townspeople, and a number of visitors from nearby villages, wandered over the coarse grass of the lawn, looking at the furniture that had largely been stacked there. The voice of the auctioneer rose monotonously and the sale began.

Mrs. Giles experienced a pang at the conclusion of every bargain. It was exactly as if these things were being stolen from her. She was not even interested in what was offered for them. Money had at last lost its significance. There was one huge lithograph of a St. Bernard dog saving a repulsively fat child, that she longed for almost passionately; there was a round-bottomed iron kettle that her eyes followed with tragic wistfulness as it was carried off, and a set of books called *Half Hours with the Best Authors* that it would have been lovely to have read. She wondered what people would do if she herself suddenly started crazily bidding.

But she simply stood by silently like some gagged and

bound victim, watching a band of thieves divide the spoils they have taken from him. Then the ordeal was over, everything was gone from the lawn, and the house was gutted and forlorn. When Will told her how much the things had brought and that the bank account that Ed had left was now considerably increased, Mrs. Giles smiled brightly.

The next day the house itself was put up for sale and placarded with the signs of its banishment, and Will and his mother started for Boston in the clumsy, high roadster.

Will had driven a car before only once or twice, and he picked his way very carefully. Nevertheless it was plain that he took great pride in this single, dubious acquisition that was all they had carried off. On the way he talked mostly of the car and its performance, and how useful it was going to prove. Mrs. Giles sat half-stifled by the fumes, and exhausted by the jouncing, and the wearing, constant concern about signs and directions. At times, her face, beaming with an inane smile, looked almost like the face of someone whose weak wits have been systematically driven into final idiocy. Then late in the afternoon, when the mountains were long behind them, Will said abruptly:

"I'm certainly glad we did what we did! It took a little nerve, Mom, but you ain't gon'er be sorry!"

"You don't mean you'd 'a' liked to live there?" Mrs. Giles faltered. "You don't mean that, Will!"

He moved uneasily, gripping the big, thick wheel a little harder.

"I didn't say that. Not that I couldn't have done it all right! But I was thinking of you, see. You're used to other things—you wouldn't want to live like a hick; and that house—well, I'll do a lot better for you than that, once I get going!"

Mrs. Giles sat listening feebly, too stunned even to find the strength for a joke, as he described grandiloquently but confusingly a kind of dwelling that must have fixed itself on his imagination from the pages of some juvenile story

book—something that had much to do with marble and ivy, and had big, brass gates in front of it.

She had an inclination to burst into tears, or wildly laugh, she did not know which. She forgave him for his folly, but she could not forgive herself for her own. He had liked that town, and the old house, almost as much as she herself had, perhaps! Mrs. Giles was too much a woman not to know and accept uncomplainingly those motives whose acceptance is intolerable to most men: she was aware he could not bear for her to have that house only because he himself had not given it to her. He was prepared to withhold her happiness from her, if his own vanity were not appeased at the same time.

But these complex considerations were too difficult to think about for long. And in any case it was too late to do anything about it now. Mrs. Giles composed her trembling hands, and fixed upon her bird-like features her foolish, appreciative smile. From her there came faint, chirping sounds of pleasure and agreement.

Nevertheless, her expectations of lasting regret were agreeably upset in the period that followed. Things were different now, with money in the bank and no anxiety ahead as to how Will was to enter upon his career.

They moved at once to a more inviting flat, refurbished their frayed wardrobes, ate regularly of things they liked, and even indulged themselves in little celebrations of pleasure now and then. Mrs. Giles began to go to the movies again quite regularly.

In the soothing dark, to the accompaniment of the bleating organ, there were no longer any fine wrinkles in her face; and the patch of nondescript fur on her coat collar became costly. She was beautiful, enticing, and distressed only by a choice of lovers with padded chests as superb as tailors' dummies. She sat watching Gloria Swanson with a dreamy smile, knowing it was only a shadow she watched, and that it was really she herself who was Gloria Swanson.

The lines faded from Will's face as if rubbed out by a

masseur, his sweetness was unmarred any longer by desperation, his occasional suffocating attacks of claustrophobia—once he had even been seized by one in an underground trolley and had had to burst his way through the astonished crowd at the door like a madman—now ceased to harrow him, as if they, too, could be pacified with money.

Under this improvement, Mrs. Giles chattered as briskly as a bird at daybreak. And she ceased to think any longer of the lost village and the gutted farmhouse that had held out to her their brief promise of happiness.

But in spite of his release from care, Will remained, except for his mother, almost as solitary as before. Perhaps he felt older than the other internes, he had been through so much more, and had found peace a pleasanter thing than excitement. Certainly, in the easy-going indulgences of the others he took no part.

Once, however, he almost became involved with one of the nurses, a good-natured girl with thick ankles, who, it was known, could be possessed by almost anyone for the price of a compliment and a highball or two. After a few kisses or so, Will arranged to go away with her to Martha's Vineyard on a free week-end, told his mother a lie which left him with the uncomfortable feeling that she knew all about his intention by instinct, and was then more relieved than anything else to learn at the last moment that the girl had been stolen away by another interne, a noisy, reckless young man named O'Malley with the brilliant eyes of a cat.

O'Malley showed up on his return with a hang-dog look—for he had known all about Will's intrigue—and the expectation of a row. He was surprised to find himself met without the least resentment and greeted instead with a perfectly amiable and tolerant smile.

"By God, you're a noble fellow, Giles," O'Malley burst out in astonishment, and the tag pleased Will in a strange way.

To be noble, to be greatly generous, to be without vindictiveness—above all to be chaste—such attributes filled

his imagination with an ideal of personality. From that moment he began to project this vision of himself, and to exaggerate, like all men, qualities that are actually half true of themselves, until from exaggeration they cease to be true at all, and represent no more than a bid of vanity for recognition and applause.

Giles' original goodness now began subtly to be a studied behaviour, and he made it felt at once that he had no designs of any kind on anyone. Particularly women were shown that they might trust him. The actual fact was that he was uneasy with girls, for he thought of them only sentimentally, and his desires were weak. He would have liked to have done kind things for them, and it baffled him to see that this did not please them half as much as the selfish wish merely to enjoy them.

His secret longing for admiration from everyone, man or woman, meanwhile expressed itself in an excessive modesty which he soon discovered was disagreeably taken as the correct estimate of his abilities. Although the hospital patients liked him and the staff physicians were good-natured to him, there was something vaguely belittling about their cordiality. And this, together with an uneasy feeling of deficiency resulting from his hastily snatched education, his vague comprehension of his uncultivated accent and his awkward manners, determined him to improve, now that he had the leisure to do so. But how? In what way should he shine? The projection of a noble soul led naturally to the cultivation of a philosophy, to profound thoughts about Time, Man and Life. He decided to study the conclusions of other withdrawn spirits.

Soon Mrs. Giles was overawed at the sight of the books he began to fetch home from a public library. One consisted of a condensation of over a thousand masterpieces of the world's best thought, compiled by a professor of philosophy. The principal facts about such figures as Plato or Spinoza were summed up in an introductory note, and often seemed astonishingly to mention chiefly how much money they had

made, or whether instead they had been quite poor. Then the professor had obligingly rewritten in his own language an abstract of these great men's thoughts, so that there seemed the strangest flat similarity between beliefs of Nietzsche and the beliefs of John Stuart Mill.

But Mrs. Giles turned this formidable volume over gingerly, when Will was out of the house, as if half expecting it might explode. A tear filled her eye at the thought of the genius who, by a physiological accident, had come to live with her.

Every evening for quite a while, Will read this and other books, slowly and painfully, his simple brain confused by recondite terms, and by abstractions whose meanings eluded him before he had finished as much as the single sentence that contained them. Nevertheless, though he did not understand a word, and secretly felt more unsure of himself than ever, he was pleased by what he was doing and his manner now mingled the gravest air of reflection along with his sunny kindliness.

"You're too deep for me," said his friend O'Malley once, shaking his head, and Giles hid his pleasure at that in a smile that was filled with the greatest unworldliness.

Only with his mother did he avoid any such pretence; with her he remained quite honest, and showed his human possession of irritability and fear. And he soon had bitter occasion to face the realities he still shared with her.

He was nearly through the probation of his interneship, and ready to think of beginning his practice when, looking into their accounts, he was thunderstruck to see how little money was now left. There was just barely enough, if that, for a painfully modest establishment. Where had it all gone? They had surely lived simply enough, had never been downright extravagant. Examining past expenditures, he gave a guilty start at discovering what the venerable roadster had cost to operate. Only a few times had he and his mother gone on an outing in it to the shore, but each occasion had produced a formidable bill for towing and repairs, after

some new, incomprehensible breakdown. And there had been constant things to buy for it, a new battery, say, or one of the expensive tires that its big wooden-spoked wheels required.

But this was not the solitary thief, not even, perhaps, the chief one. The larger half of Uncle Ed's money had simply dribbled away in expenditures that had seemed insignificant by themselves, but put together made an alarming total—as if all he and his mother had previously learned had actually taught them nothing.

From this time on he would have to practise the strictest economy. His blood turned cold at the thought of their finding themselves in the wretched situation they had been in before their windfall.

It was in the midst of this cruel inventory that O'Malley, in trouble with some new girl or other, came begging for the loan of a couple of hundred dollars. Will did not particularly like O'Malley, and knew from his reputation he could not in the least trust him and his glib promises. But suddenly, unaccountably, with that vague air of other-worldliness in his eyes, he heard himself assenting. Afterwards he was secretly troubled. He tried to tell himself that he had merely proven the sincerity of his philosophy. The very fact that he did not much care for O'Malley made it just so much more necessary for him to have done what he had. He was unable to admit that actually he had paid that price—and would pay any price—to encourage the illusion of his unpractical saintliness in others, even though that illusion was accompanied also by contempt. That night, without knowing why, he buried his head in his pillow and groaned.

However, he had returned hurriedly to measures of self-denial, and in the evenings his chief enjoyment was the careful preparation of a budget of expenditures for the opening of his career. This seemed to make everything come out with a beautiful mathematical precision, balancing requirements perfectly with what money was left, and he

grew more encouraged. Now, in the middle of this warm summer, he had found himself free of the hospital at last, and had set about hunting an office that was suitable yet could be secured at the sum which his budget had allotted for it.

But after three depressing weeks it had begun to dawn on him that there might possibly be something wrong with the budget itself. And today he was depressed by the feeling that he was making some profound mistake without in the least being able to define what it was.

As he now sat on the hard park bench, he absently kicked at the dirt beneath, and then listlessly stirred. Some sparrows, that had been feeding nearby, rose in a brief, chattering flutter and descended only a little farther away. Mrs. Giles, turning to look swiftly at her son, contrived unconsciously to suggest the same alertness and timidity as these small creatures. Her shoulders rose and fell as though remembering some atavistic flutter of their own, and completing the similarity, she stooped down meaninglessly, picked up a pebble and promptly dropped it. But her face was happy again, for she saw that though he was still dispirited, he was at least not angry with her any longer.

"Maybe we should go now," she said gaily. "I'm so rested I'm all tired out again!"

Will slowly drew the crumpled newspaper list out of his pocket and studied it. However, only two places remained to be visited. The first offered a front-floor apartment for sixty-five dollars and named many advantages.

Mrs. Giles exclaimed: "I just bet we're going to have luck this time. You know my hunches—well, I've got one now!"

But this new try, though more quickly disposed of, was quite as hopeless in another way as the one before it. The declarations of the advertisement proved sadly optimistic: the "exclusive neighbourhood" of its wording turned out to be a run-down street, full of rooming-houses with soiled lace curtains at their windows, and here and there a shoddy

basement restaurant; and the apartment itself, "ideal for professional office," had old-fashioned double doors on which the black paint looked burned, mournfully high ceilings, and an ornamental hearth topped with a mantel of veined marble.

And when the landlady, sporting gold hair and a matching gold tooth, tried to wheedle some medical advice out of Will for nothing, it was the last straw. He stood listening to her patiently, until Mrs. Giles, chirruping and tugging at his arm, managed to drag him out to the street.

When they were some distance away, Mrs. Giles said thoughtfully: "Well, I guess that hunch of mine wasn't so good after all!" She emitted a feeble giggle.

"We might as well look at this last one, anyway," said Will. "It isn't far off."

They crossed several more streets and came abruptly upon a pleasant, shaded thoroughfare. It was very quiet here. An air of orderliness and respectability floated in the air, definite, yet intangible like perfume. There were a number of other doctors' offices to be seen. And Will was instantly impressed by the address to which this last advertisement had led him.

The small house was of rust-coloured brick. Its elegance had faded, but there still hovered about it an aristocratic look. There was a gate and a grass patch in front. A large bow-window of plate glass shone like a handsome eye. Opulent people must have lived here once upon a time; and even now the place suggested it had never really been neglected. It exuded none of the stale, deathly odours which are the ghosts of generations of vanished tenants.

A respectful Swedish janitor let them in. At the first glimpse of the rooms, Giles made a sucking sound of approval with his teeth. They were admirable, all either spacious or interesting. And everything had been newly painted, and looked decent, sweet and clean. There was a fine tiled bathroom, an alcove that held possibilities for a laboratory, rooms that were perfect for examination and

consultation, and a large, long one that was excellent for a waiting room.

It was easy to conceive a group of assorted patients sitting here in a stealthy hush, thumbing over stale copies of *The National Geographic Magazine* under dim table lamps. A receptionist in starched white could be supposed quitting a portable typewriter and a card-index file every so often to summon one of them into a room full of the latest appliances, or into an office containing a small desk with a telephone and a prescription pad on it, together with some cabinets backed up against the wall, full of gleaming geometric-looking instruments and bottles of antiseptics, stimulants and sedatives.

Aroused by such imaginings, Will demanded abruptly, like someone torn violently from sleep:

"How much is this?"

"Two hundred dollars a month it is," said the Swede in his mild accent.

Giles uttered a short and painful laugh. "I don't doubt it—I don't doubt it a bit! I ought to have known that, soon as I came in here. Well, thanks anyway!"

As they went out, he cast a reluctant, yearning glance behind him, and Mrs. Giles trembled with a violent impulse.

"Let's go somewhere and get a cup of tea," she suggested in a wheedling tone.

"We shouldn't, Mom. You know what I said only last week. Every penny counts."

"Oh, but just a cup of tea, Will!" she pleaded. "What's that, anyway?"

He frowned but acquiesced. A block or so beyond, a main street cut across their progress at right angles. There were trolley tracks on it, and the sounds of traffic. Stores of various kinds shouldered each other along the pavement. Mrs. Giles indicated a restaurant whose windows advertised in raised enamel letters that it had tables for ladies.

"This'll do, Will. It'll only be a nickel here."

They sat over their tea for some time in silence. Then

Mrs. Giles exclaimed nervously: "Will, you ought to take that place! That's what you ought to do!"

He lifted his head with a startled look. "For two hundred dollars? Are you crazy?"

"Sure, crazy like an owl! Will, I just feel in my bones you ought to do it!"

"But we couldn't!" he protested again in a voice that was at once exasperated at such an impossible suggestion and eager to hear any argument in favour of it.

"Look," said Mrs. Giles. "You and me could live anywhere, so long as it was dirt cheap—and save money that way, see? And then put all the rent into the office."

"Mom, on what we got left, and the furniture I got to buy, we couldn't even keep that place up for three months!"

"Three months!" cried Mrs. Giles with immense scorn. "Why, you wouldn't need one! Just look at what you told me about that friend of yours who started in only last May and how wonderfully he's doing already!"

"His father's a doctor," said Will. "And he's got a lot of influential friends too. And you can't count on things like that, anyway."

Mrs. Giles played her last card with calm foreknowledge, like a player stretching out his hand to drag in a sure trick.

"But I want you to take it for my sake. I don't know how you can expect to buy me that big house you talk about, if you won't. Why, in a place like that you'll make money like a regular Rockefeller! I can just see the patients running up each other's backs trying to get in! I tell you I got one of my hunches!"

Will did not answer immediately. He stared broodingly into his cup of strong tea. At last he shook his head.

"It's crazy even to think about it any more!" he said. But his tone lacked conviction.

They took a last look, frightened and proud, before closing the door and going out to the street.

For nearly a month they had been intensely busy, poking

about in secondhand furniture shops, and visiting big department stores. With each purchase Will had experienced a kind of wrench, exactly as if a tooth had come out. But with a feeling of panic he knew there was now no drawing back, and no way to go except ahead.

Gradually he had grown a little drunk from his excess of spending. He recklessly brushed aside the thought of all consequences. But it was strange how much the beautiful office with its handful of rooms swallowed up; it was like throwing things into the sea. Even now, after all he put into it, it still looked somewhat bare.

But the rugs, tables and pictures, the chairs, couches and lamps, the cabinets, instruments, and equipment, were all in, all arranged, and cleaned, polished and dusted for the final time. Everything sparkled like the face of a scrubbed child. Mrs. Giles had almost killed herself with work.

A little while ago they had seen there was really no more to be done. They were tired but excited. They sat down in various rooms, trying different chairs. They spoke in low exultant voices, as they stared gravely and happily at this place that contained all their hopes. Mrs. Giles asked questions that did not need to be answered, and were not.

"Do you feel that table would be better over there? My, that picture does look lovely! I guess no one would know that came from the ten-cent store! . . . Are those curtains long enough, do you think?"

The afternoon had begun to fade; it had been time to go. As they left and closed the door, Mrs. Giles paused to look at the brass plaque outside on which was stamped Will's name, with "M.D." after it. She began to polish it with her sleeve, then stood back admiringly. For a moment Will had the horrible feeling she was about to clasp her hands in front of it in an attitude of prayer.

And just at that moment his embarrassed eyes noticed that from a window across the street someone was, indeed, watching them. He had an impression of a rather thin young woman with a protuberant brow and eyes that

caught what light there was with a weak glitter. Even across that distance their glances met and locked. Then she slid from view and was gone. But he was filled with a peculiar and incomprehensible uneasiness, like the uneasiness that seizes upon the mind in an appalling solitude, or arises from a swiftly-passing consciousness of those shadowy, inanimate forces that are held at bay by laughter, cities, games, children, plays, music, and war. He pulled himself around with a start, exclaiming fiercely:

"Mom, stop doing that! Look, we gotta act different around here! Come on!"

He took her arm and impatiently drew her down to the curb where the battered roadster was standing. Giles started it, and smoke wreathed from the dashboard like a fired shotgun. They rode for a mile before they came to the tenement in which they had taken an apartment of two rooms for living-quarters.

In all their experience this was the most sordid habitation they had ever had. The building itself was foul. Ash cans cluttered its areaway, and starved-looking cats prowled there. Some of the other lodgers were sprawling on the steps in the fine weather as they arrived, and looked up at them vacantly. The door fell open at their touch, and they picked their way up a stairway covered with greasy oilcloth. Their apartment was on the top floor. A hideous bathroom with a corroded metal tub could be seen through a dark doorway in the passage. Voices rose faintly in the air, suggesting the sounds of squalling children or wearily quarrelling adults. There was a pervasive odour of frying food in the un-stirred air.

"No place like home!" said Mrs. Giles with her brightest chirp.

Unexpectedly, the remark struck Will as immeasurably humorous. Perhaps it was because he was so tired and so anxious, that his nerves relaxed into a kind of hysteria. He pointed out in gulps of laughter the contrast between this place and the splendid office.

Mrs. Giles, delighted by the success of her small joke, exclaimed: "All front and no back—that's us!"

She had taken off her hat, and was engaged in removing from the window-sill the bag of food she had set aside for a little celebration. This had been procured from a neighbourhood delicatessen and consisted of slices of boiled ham and various bolognas, a paper dish of potato salad, a tin of sardines, some crackers and a dusty-looking jelly roll.

"Yes, all front and no back," she repeated, wrinkling up her nose while she tried to think of still more sallies to keep him roaring on.

When they sat down at the plain, board table, they were both quite weak. Will patted his mother's hand speechlessly. He was at this moment neither anxious nor afraid, but instead buoyed up by a feeling of delightful confidence.

And surely for Giles, and that career which was to open on the bright tomorrow, would not everything be richly fortunate? If that were not so, how could they both have laughed so gaily that Summer night?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AND YET, IN spite of the laughter that went soaring up that night under the rooftop of the squalid tenement house, that laughter of a son and a mother that had in it the large quality of ease and of fearlessness, the point of the joke itself soon wore thin.

It was not the wretched tenement with its reek of decay, its murky stairways, and the brutalized existence led by the very poor people who inhabited it, which Will came to hate; it was the splendid office itself.

For in the tenement there was at least a sense of life, though this expressed itself only in a kind of confused and desperate struggle. But the office was full of the sense of death. Its deep peace was delicately mocking; the sunlight stole in like an ironic ghost and sat attentively waiting there.

In the profound hush the clock ticked too plainly, pointing out how slowly the seconds passed, how many of them there still were, and yet how soon all would be gone.

Now and then there could faintly be heard in the passage outside the arrival or departure of one of the few other tenants in the handsome building. But they happened all to be quiet people, who came and went almost invisibly, so that Giles hardly became acquainted with their faces and scarcely knew their names.

In this deep, unvisited stillness, after a very brisk arrival each morning, he would first examine his mail, of which there was always a good deal, and always of the same nature: samples of all manner of drugs and preparations; carefully worded brochures from the big chemical companies promoting their wares; advertisements and various printed matter of a medical nature. But as there was no one for him to try the proprietary chemicals on, about their ceaseless arrival there came to be something a little taunting. Before long, indeed, they began to fill a small closet, from which they were eventually rescued by Mrs. Giles, who swallowed some of each on the chance that she had the ailment it was supposed to cure.

When Giles had dutifully looked through everything each morning, he retired to the room he had appointed as his office. Leaning back in his chair behind the desk, he then read with plodding carefulness the medical journal he subscribed to, while at the same time he was filled with resentment like a dull, aching sensation. Surely he was entitled to be done with study now, to be allowed to put into effect what he knew already! And yet to have read a novel, or even a newspaper, would have depressed him still more.

When he had first begun, he had pinned his hopes chiefly on the promises of several staff doctors at the hospital, and others who had casually mentioned that they intended to send him any cases they themselves could not find time to handle. What had happened to all these mysterious cases?

Perhaps there was no oversupply after all! Or perhaps he had inspired only liking in his kind friends, but not much confidence. At any rate, he soon saw he would have to rely entirely upon himself to build up a practice.

But how in the world did one do that? One could not acquire patients by seizing someone by the arm in the street! It was necessary to know people, of course, to join clubs, societies, organizations, to play golf and bridge, or perhaps join a church. But Giles had no talent for these normal associations, indeed he shrank from them; and whenever chance did throw him across any stranger, he was so fearful of being suspected of predatory intentions, that he became quite cold and brusque, and emitted a laugh that had a concealed, almost inimical sound.

Yet all the while he thought of nothing else, being full of worry that increased in exact proportion to the passing of time. He had supposed himself activated by a longing to help people and relieve their misery, but he now felt that he really disliked them, and he wished them to come to him only that he might relieve his own.

Sometimes, sitting in his lifeless office, he would rise, softly whistling to himself, and with his hands in his pockets, saunter into his dimly-lighted waiting room. Staring out of the window there, he would see, some distance down the street, a building that housed half a dozen other doctors. Cars were always closely parked before its doors, cabs drew up every so often, and there were always people on foot, arriving or leaving.

After watching with a melancholy scrutiny for a while, Giles would recover himself abruptly, march back hastily to his office as if something pressing recalled him there, pick up his medical review, throw it down, fall to winding his watch, and wonder how much longer all this was to go on.

He could only comfort himself by the superstition that by this suffering, this weariness and despair, he might finally propitiate some malevolent force that was probing the limits of his endurance.

There was one small ordeal of regular occurrence for which his mother was responsible. Every day she indulged herself in a single tiny luxury, spending a nickel to telephone him from a booth in a neighbouring cigar store. At first he had been glad of that interruption. But as time went on, the possibility that the jangle of the phone might really mean that someone was calling for an appointment became an obsession with him. Surely it could be that just as well as not!

But each time when he picked up the receiver and cleared his throat importantly, he heard only his mother's high-pitched, chirruping tone, her trickle of insignificant gossip, her latest comic thought, and that irritating instant of silence which always asked the same question: had anyone called, had there been a patient? She always made a tiny clucking sound with her tongue that expressed her sympathy, and this invariably caused Giles to give an angry start. He was cross and sharp with her, making it plain, in a way she could not possibly have misunderstood, that he wished her to leave off the exacerbating habit. But in this particular she remained unexpectedly obstinate, and pretended not to hear the irritation in his voice, as if she were determined to have her own way here, no matter how he felt.

He was now relieved to escape from his office at the end of each day; it was what he spent all his time waiting for, and he felt happier always on the long walk home.

Indeed, it was remarkable how often he managed to relegate his anxieties to an obscure place in the back of his brain, where they troubled him only with the dull vagueness of a headache. He succeeded quite skilfully in refusing to face them for whole days at a time.

It was only on Saturday mornings when he went to the Savings Bank and stood in line with a withdrawal-slip in his hand that he felt almost ill with awareness. Was there no way of halting that hideous dwindling? As it was, there was not an economy he and his mother did not practise. Mrs. Giles knew the secret of how to mix a lonely egg with

enough flour and baking powder to make it puff up into the semblance of a really sizable omelet; and how to augment a few cents' worth of the cheapest hamburger with stale bread so that it, too, made an ample appearance and was quite tasty.

In these months the dulled acceptance that he had made some incomprehensible mistake, forced its way upon his mind, and the realization that he had dropped into failure as softly as into a bed of cotton wool was sickeningly plain. Giles did not know what he would have done without George Galbraith.

He had met Galbraith shortly after he had first opened his office. At that time he had joined the County Medical Society, and never failed to attend its meetings. How jovial and relaxed everyone was on those evenings! It made Giles feel relaxed, too. He always went home in high spirits, and these sometimes did not wear off for an entire day.

One evening at such a meeting he noticed a stranger. He was probably a guest, a visitor from out of town, for Will could not recollect having seen him before. And his appearance was certainly not the kind to have been forgotten easily, as he sat there, listening with a peculiar droop of his eyelids, while some paper or other was being read.

It seemed to Giles that this man glanced once or twice in his direction with equal curiosity; and this was confirmed when, after the meeting broke up and he went outside, the stranger fell casually into step beside him and began to utter commonplaces in an agreeable, deep voice.

He said his name was Galbraith and suggested that they go somewhere and have a drink. Having then, without difficulty, discovered a speakeasy, which advertised itself by displaying some nondescript articles between dirty, green curtains and fly-specked windows, he managed to get himself and Giles admitted, and ordered a couple of gin-and-gingerales.

The room was crowded and hot, and full of a babble of voices. Streamers of tobacco smoke hung as motionless as if they had been painted on the ceiling.

"How did Dr. Styles' paper strike you?" Giles asked.

"I never heard such damned nonsense in my life."

Giles was startled, almost a little shocked. He looked at Galbraith gravely, unable to make up his mind whether he liked him or not. Galbraith was leaning against the bar with some of the stooping quality of a very tall man, an effect probably of many years of lowering his head to observe the phenomena and attend to the utterances of a pigmy race. He seemed to be about forty, and his ugly, interesting face ended in a diabolical-looking, yet rather unkempt, reddish beard. His eyes had that paradoxical look which nearly always accompanies an arresting individuality. They had a saturnine expression as if they completely derided the importance of anyone and anything, and yet at the same time they somehow managed to be altogether kind, and as free from ordinary malice as the eyes of an aging dog.

"You certainly got an unusual viewpoint!" said Giles, becoming ungrammatical in his rising resentment.

Galbraith merely grinned. He took another swallow of his drink, and then said: "Let's get out of here. This stuff is horrible."

"We could go to my office," Giles suggested hopefully, with a sudden desire to impress this arrogant stranger, and imagining his fine office might do just that. "Of course I haven't anything to drink there, but——"

"Let's go to my office instead, then," said Galbraith promptly, and laying down the money for the drinks, he propelled Giles outside and at once hailed a passing cab.

They drove a considerable distance until Giles began to wonder more and more where Galbraith could be taking him. At last the cab drew up, and getting out and hastily paying the fare with a wrench of guilt, Will saw the dark shape of a long wharf. Galbraith marched ahead in the darkness past the ghostly shapes of piled freight. Presently the plates of a ship of probably some ten thousand tons could be made out. Galbraith led the way up a gangplank, plunged into a companionway, descended to another deck, and unlocked

the door of a large, comfortable-looking cabin. Supported by racks in a couple of built-in cabinets, were various medical instruments and supplies. There was a shabby easy chair, a small immovable desk, and some homely, personal appointments.

"My office!" said Galbraith with a grin. He dove into one of the cabinets and came out with a bottle and some glasses.

Giles understood at last. So Galbraith was a ship's doctor! He learned that his new acquaintance was sailing again tomorrow on this small liner that made brief tourist cruises to the West Indies. He got back to the city every few weeks, he said. Now he began to ask Giles questions about himself, and smiled as if interested, though Giles had an impression he never heard a word except those he himself uttered.

When, very late, he went home, his head was spinning as much from the wild talk as the excellent whiskey he had swallowed. Galbraith had promised to look him up the next time he came into port, but Will did not expect ever to see him again.

One evening, however, barely a month later, when he had just come home, there was a loud knock on his door in the tenement, and answering it, Giles saw to his horror Galbraith standing there. Galbraith at once announced that he had ascertained Giles' home address from the Medical Society, and come here directly from his ship. Giles felt ready to sink to the floor with shame at being discovered in such disreputable quarters, but presently, after he explained that he had begun life as a newsboy, he noticed that Galbraith did not even seem to notice, or at any rate to mind in the least. Certainly he displayed none of that grave pleasure which is usually presented as sympathy.

And talking of himself as violently as ever, he filled the two dingy rooms with his affable gusto. Mrs. Giles sat watching him shyly, but it was not ten minutes before Galbraith was calling her Nelly. Her smile deepened, and in the fine mesh of wrinkles on her cheeks, an incongruous dimple

appeared and became fixed. It was clear she was quite overwhelmed by their magnificent visitor.

Presently, as her unusual shyness wore off, she exclaimed with a delighted chirrup: "Why, you're just like my Uncle Charley! The spitting image,—or the image of him spitting, as my father used to say. When I was a little girl, he used to come to the house every Sunday. He always——"

She then noticed that Will was beginning to wriggle as he usually did when she said something that mysteriously displeased him, and she broke off with a foolish laugh as if that were all she had intended to say anyway.

Galbraith insisted on carrying them both off to dinner in a restaurant. They had a gay time. Mrs. Giles laughed so often and so hard she had no time to utter any jokes of her own. She beamed at her son, and her son's friend, full of pride at her association with these splendid specimens, and glancing around now and then in a superior sort of way at the other women in the restaurant. Galbraith ordered what seemed to the two Giles a wonderful dinner, and then proceeded to declare everything abominable, at the same time eating with the greatest relish. He hardly stopped talking for a minute. He was evidently one of those persons who speak with the greatest glibness, hoping to hear himself say something good, and quite as surprised as everyone else whenever he does so. But the effectiveness of these interspersed statements was nearly always belittled by the blunders, exaggerations and contradictions with which it was effusively surrounded; and like most people, too, Galbraith went on speaking long after he was through.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Giles now and then shook her head, with her pale eyes full of inarticulate awe. Her voice, when she spoke, quivered with an emotion like happiness.

Afterwards, they wandered back towards the tenement, but Will now had a burning desire to have Galbraith come and inspect his office, and forced Galbraith to assent.

"What do you want to go there for?" Mrs. Giles asked. "At this time of night!"

"Don't ask embarrassing questions, Nelly!" said Galbraith. "Don't you realize we've got a couple of girls waiting?"

Mrs. Giles' eyes filled with sudden tears. She stood on her doorstep looking down at both of them, feeling herself the completest woman, feeling herself wiser than they, yet grateful for the tolerance of these formidable if stupid creatures. Like a child she was able to believe what she knew at the same time was not true, and she felt all at once oddly delighted at their manhood, and the prospect of their robust dissipation.

"Oh, you're just two bad boys!" she exclaimed. "And I'm sorry for those girls—yes, I am!"

Will and Galbraith walked across the town, and Will opened up the dark office and displayed it to his new friend. It was one of the few occasions he had ever taken any pleasure in it. But Galbraith only frowned and said "Hm!" a couple of times, demanding abruptly how much all this cost. He whistled in indignation at the information, and asked whether Giles was taking in enough to meet this amount.

Will admitted frankly that so far he had not even had a single patient. He asked Galbraith what he thought the trouble was. Galbraith declared that the place was not only too expensive, it looked too expensive, and so might even be frightening patients away.

Will was beginning to enjoy himself immensely. The matter-of-fact tone of the discussion was full of the pleasing honesty which is concerned only with the monetary aspect of any art, or trade, or profession.

Casually, Galbraith let slip more information about himself. Will learned he had run away, not from a scandal or anything of that sort, but because of a "theory." He had closed his door on a prosperous practice because he feared and hated property. He was perfectly happy in owning nothing, and wished to own nothing. That explained his attitude about many things that had been somewhat puzzling. But Will, who was unable to comprehend anything

that differed from normal conduct and conventional aspirations, began to look down on him with a certain kindly superiority. Poor Galbraith, he thought.

Still, Galbraith was no fool. He was perfectly able to discuss Will's problems from the most practical standpoint. His answers and comments were invariably sound; and when he had heard everything from the chair into which he had flung himself, with his excessively long legs reaching out in front of him as stiff as stilts, he suddenly said calmly:

"Why don't you get out of here? You'll never make a go of it in this place! Just break your lease and run. You'd do much better in a small town—exactly the kind of place I was in."

Will began to tremble. He resented this advice from someone whom he pitied as a failure. His own voice grew suddenly tense.

"I'm goner stick right here!" he said. "I'm goner stick here, and show everybody yet!"

Galbraith was silent. He squinted thoughtfully at his immense feet that seemed half a room away. After a while he smiled and nodded.

"Good boy!" he said mildly. "That's the way to talk. Sure, that's the way!"

After this occasion Galbraith became a regular visitor whenever he was in port, and sometimes he was ashore for as much as a week at a time. Because he showed no criticism, he became privy to the troubled fortunes of the Giles household, and the confidant of their forebodings and hopes.

In spite of his florid talk, full of many sweeping generalities and inconsistencies, it was curious what an enormous feeling of sanity he exuded. But though Will unconsciously hung upon this, he continued to think of Galbraith as an agreeable, somewhat pathetic eccentric. And this attitude was in turn completely duplicated by Galbraith, who seemed to consider Will as helpless as a child. Their warm, rapid friendship was thus founded upon their mutual kindly derision.

Soon Mrs. Giles was half in love with him. She would look at the calendar and say hopefully: "It's about time for George now. Yes, he ought to be back any day. My, if you only knew how much he was like my Uncle Charley!"

She was very glad of the friendship that had sprung up between him and Will. It was the only intimate, personal contact Will had outside of herself, and in her instinct she felt that this was good, that her own absorption of him, though it was her happiness, was not right, and might bring about his unhappiness sometime or other.

Certainly Galbraith was very fond of Will, and for some reason Giles never minded his blunt questions about his luck, as he did his mother's bright and nervous trills of unspoken curiosity. For the bad luck, the nearly incredible luck continued, like some personal and studied assault by Fate.

"Not a single one yet," Giles would say, as if almost proud of his record, the very first moment Galbraith arrived to look inquiringly at him.

Galbraith would laugh as if delighted, an altogether cheerful sound.

Then one day, when Spring was just around the corner, the first real patient came to Will's office at last.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

HE HEARD HIS bell ring, and supposing it was the postman, or the Swedish janitor, or some other interruption of no moment, he answered the door indifferently. He then found himself staring confusedly at a woman about whose face there was a look of much familiarity, though he could not place where or when he had ever seen her before.

Her pale eyes had a thyroid bulge, as though she were being delicately but firmly choked. Her brow swept back in a high arch, as innocent of intellect as a baby's; and she did not seem to know how to arrange her dead, straw-

coloured hair to soften this defect. She appeared to be about twenty-eight or twenty-nine, possibly she had even passed thirty. But under her frightened-looking, unprepossessing head, in which there was little that was attractive, her body flowed in long soft curves, making an impact of direct invitation. And this incongruity of the handsome body surmounted by its undistinguished head, together with his inexplicable feeling of having seen her before and noticed her before, held Giles blankly standing there with an effect of gaping at her.

"May I come in?" she asked at last in a rather high-pitched voice that suggested uncontrollable nerves. "I wanted to see you about——"

With a start Giles recovered himself. Whatever else she was, she was a patient, his first, that stone dropped before his door that must surely be a prelude to the ultimate avalanche.

"We are neighbours, I believe," she said with a kind of foolish gaiety, never taking her intent eyes from his face. "We've passed each other a number of times on the street, I think." She gave him an idiotically arch smile.

So that was it, that accounted for her look of familiarity, he had probably glanced absently at her face quite often without conscious awareness.

He cleared his throat, smiled into a mirror as he went by, and showed her into his office.

"Yes, I live right across the street from you," she went on, and the words, the intonation, suddenly struck a chord of memory. With a plunge he recalled that evening, months ago, when he and his mother had finished their task of cleaning and decorating, and he had noticed the eyes of a woman bent piercingly upon him from a window over the way. He dimly remembered that he had known an unaccountable uneasiness at the time, like the feeling experienced by someone who has been studied secretly for some while by a person he did not know was in the room before. Was this that same woman? What on earth had he

been uneasy about?—for at close quarters she seemed to be harmless enough.

He learned that her name was Emma Bass and that she worked as a librarian in a branch library nearby. He caught some muddled, flippant phrases about a married sister out West, and gathered that Miss Bass lived quite alone.

But her eyes, fixed like the eyes of an animal and having no laughter in them at all, rendered Giles mysteriously uncomfortable. She was watching him, as though she were drinking in everything about him, waiting to pounce upon the least movement of his hands, his eyelids, that faintest twitch of his mouth, as if from such small signs she hoped to feel some disquieting and tormented eagerness.

She hastily delivered an account of symptoms that were too many and too inconsistent to matter; headaches, fits of depression, insomnia, attacks of indigestion and abdominal pains—she suffered all of them. She must be really very ill, she was sure, and she could not think what was wrong.

Giles had already made up his mind that there was really nothing the matter with her but hysteria.

He began to ask her some routine, perfunctory questions, and she answered these with alacrity as if trying to urge him further. Before he had even invited her, she flung herself zestfully into the frankest details of her functions as though finding relief in this outpouring. Her eyes glittered a little, and in the pale skin, through which the big veins showed, a little flush appeared.

It was plain that it was really about this she had come here to talk, to utter things that had become desperately important only because they had been bottled up so long. In spite of his hospital experience, Giles, like most men, was a little alarmed by any active sexual expression in women, not only because of the code imposed by ages of a ridiculous ideal of demureness, but also, perhaps, because the violence in a thoroughly aroused woman may make the simple male brutality seem nearly innocent by comparison.

No, he certainly didn't like this Miss Bass, with her

beautiful figure and her plain, feverish-eyed head. He didn't like her giggle, and her preoccupation with her body, and above all, her gluttonous examination of the effect on him as she poured out her story.

But what had that to do with it? She wanted some kind of help which he could probably give, and she was willing to pay for it. She said she could stay but a few minutes now. He wrote out a prescription for a sedative, and told her to come back as soon as she had sufficient time for a complete examination.

She explained that she got out of her library about five. Could she come in in the late afternoon?

"I'm here every day until five-thirty," he answered.

"You always leave at least ten minutes before that!" she exclaimed with an intensity that was out of all proportion to the correction.

He was startled, and she, too, appeared confused, as if she had not meant to say that. She got up, saying she would come in the day after tomorrow, and escaped quickly, the door making a hollow sound behind her.

On the way home that evening, thinking of this woman who had nothing much the matter with her but who could pay a fee, and of patients who had nearly everything wrong with them and no money, he wondered why she had caused him to feel so uncomfortable. That would cost her something, too! She would be made to pay at least one of those hideous monthly rentals for him!

As he climbed the fetid stairway of the tenement, his mind shrank at telling his news to his mother. He could not bear the thought of her gush of enthusiasm, her certain reaction of overwhelming and depressing optimism. Did he have to say anything at all to her? But when her eyes fell upon him like the swiftly observant, inaggressive eyes of a sparrow, he blurted out the information, as if to get it over as soon as possible, in a sulky voice.

"Well, I had a patient today finally . . ." He told her the remainder in a couple of abrupt sentences. But to his relief

and surprise, Mrs. Giles, merely looking at him intently and then looking away again, said in a perfectly unexcited tone: "That's nice, Will; that's real nice."

Giles had made his appointment with Miss Emma Bass two days later. He was therefore surprised late on the following afternoon, just before leaving his office at the end of a particularly enervating day, to find Miss Bass calling again.

Her face this time looked drawn, almost ugly with strain. Yet it was possible that once, if only once, there must have been a moment when the flowering body had poured some of its beauty, some accent of colouring and animation, into that drained head. On some forgotten night, at some forgotten dance, she must have been permitted briefly to seem a pretty girl.

But now her eyes had a tell-tale rim as though they had been engaged in much weeping recently. Her mouth quivered and jumped, and her voice fell off-key in her first words.

"May I see you—just for a moment—to tell you—I've got to tell you—how sorry I am, the way I behaved yesterday! I saw I was making you angry. But I'm not like that at all. You don't know what I'm really like—I wanted to explain——"

In this rapid jumble that seemed to express an obscure apology for some unguessed offence, her breath failed her, and she began unashamedly to cry.

Will led her back to the office, gave her a glass of water, and spoke soothingly. He critically watched her drink with a hand that shook. Some of the water spilled down her chin. Nothing could now restrain her. With an abject weakness about which there was something repellent, and with no longer any pretence of gaiety, she began to pour out the wretchedly flat story of an enforced spinsterhood, of a monotonous and friendless existence, and the intolerable loneliness that drove a mind, unprepared for thought, back only upon its own feeble resources for consolation. As she

went on confessing, she went on crying, softly and persistently, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief made into a ball. Will was conscious of the most unexpected irascibility.

"The trouble with you," he burst out unexpectedly, "is you haven't any character! That's what's the trouble with you!"

Her weeping ceased at once at the new note of his voice. She looked up expectantly, but without any trace of indignation in her prominent eyes.

He now forgot all about his plans for conducting an elaborate raid on Miss Bass's finances. He repudiated her and washed his hands of her, telling her bluntly he was certain there was nothing in the least the matter with her. Why didn't she force herself to go out more, and make friends, and try to have a good time? Why didn't she stop thinking about herself?

Surprised at his own vehemence, he broke off curtly, telling her he was late, he had some patients to attend to now. Miss Bass, breathing very slowly and evenly, with her eyes fixed upon him still, said she would never forget what he had done for her, she would never cease to be grateful. She held out her hand, and stared at him with a look of grave intimacy, as if something altogether important had passed between them, an infuriating solemnity about nothing. He gave a grunt of relief at her departure, and then feeling already a wave of reaction at his own unpremeditated outburst, and angry that he should have been angry about nothing, moodily plunged in the direction of home.

But when he told his mother what he had done, she merely said: "You know what's best, Will, of course. Never mind, dear, there'll be others," and that mild self-effacing voice filled him with an affectionate pang so that he looked up at her admiringly, and in her admired all women, forgetting his revulsion against Miss Bass.

It occurred to him that George Galbraith was due back very soon from the Caribbean, and thinking of telling Galbraith about what had happened, he made a grimace.

He imagined Galbraith's roar of laughter so vividly that he began to laugh, too, though somewhat sheepishly. He had had a patient finally—and kicked her out!

It was the last time he was to laugh like that for some while. With the disappearance of Miss Bass as a paying prospect, the worries that had been lurking all about, suddenly assumed form and actuality, and fell upon him like a cloudburst.

And the climax was reached when, after a few dollars of their meagre household money had mysteriously disappeared, Will came by accident upon a Sweepstakes ticket tucked away in the bureau that served for a desk. His mother had purchased it, of course; that was where the vanished household money had gone; she had lied about it; and at this mute admission of her desperation, he moaned aloud.

Of late he had been giving one day each week to a clinic, not out of humanitarianism, or even from professional convention, so much as from the longing to feel himself in some way actively practising.

Returning from the hospital on an afternoon when the work had been particularly demanding, he felt so harassed by his nerves as to be almost faint. Solely out of habit, he stopped off on his way home at the office that had so cruelly betrayed him.

The darkness had fallen when he reached there. As he opened the small iron gate, his eyes fell upon a figure waiting there. It was Miss Bass again. A curious feeling of rage possessed him.

"What is it?" he snapped. "What is it you want now?"

But to his astonishment the voice that came out of the dimness vibrated with a detestation that surpassed his own.

"I came to tell you you're a cad, a hateful cad, do you hear? I despise you, and if you think I don't know you were sneering at me the other day——"

Giles had at first an extraordinary desire to laugh. This idiotic upbraiding, coming on top of all his troubles, filled

him with hysteria. He controlled a gulp that sprang into his throat. A strange, weary curiosity rose in him.

"Come inside," he said mildly. "I don't know what I did to upset you."

The door closed behind them, and he clicked on a switch. But they were in the darkness still, for the electricity had been turned off. However, paying no attention to that, nor to anything else, Miss Bass continued crazily to revile and abuse him, accusing him of things so unfounded and so nonsensical that it was impossible even to resent them. Her high-flown words, full of the clichés of the cheapest sort of fiction, tumbled over one another faster and faster. He stood observing her wonderingly with a bemused air. He was just able to make out the glitter of her thrust-out eyes in the reflections from a street lamp, streaming through the window, and her insignificant head lifted in an attitude of scorn on her superb throat.

As he now listened, all his thoughts, all his opinions about her, underwent a violent and unexpected alteration. In her unhappiness, he read a greater pain than in his own. He began for the first time to feel sorry for her; he began to be restored to the faintest lift of self-esteem by the instinctive knowledge that she was in love with him, that she had been in love with him, perhaps, for a long time, or with some imagined projection of him, ever since she had stared at him from the window across the street.

"My poor girl," he began, when she cried out in such protest at that patronizing phrase that he glanced fearfully toward the ceiling. He was afraid she meant to start screaming. He reached out and caught her arm to try to stop her. All at once, before he was prepared for it, she emitted a sobbing sound and pressed her lips upon his. The false struggle, the false rage, went instantly out of her.

"Oh, my God!" she said faintly. "Oh, my God!"

He was afraid she was going to fall. He drew her over to the sofa in the dark waiting room, and made her sit down there, while his head raced with contradictory impulses. She

was his for the taking, and in the blackness, the softness and firmness of her finely shaped body had its own voice. But that he could not obey, it was like suicide. Yet he could not dismiss her either.

In the dark, which, with its denial of all light, seemed to deny all commonplace things, including sanity, Giles could feel her thoughts ecstatically lifted to the inexpressible. With horrible alarm, he perceived that she had somehow interpreted the kiss she had forced on him, the kiss that he had accepted and even returned, and their sitting here together in the vibrating dark, as an indication that he had accepted her devotion, too, and meant to do something about it.

But he was only sorry for her! An inner voice screamed in his brain: tell her so, and escape! Yet he could not, and he sat on, listening to her growing calmer and calmer as he grew more and more nervous, and hearing her say that she would help him from now on, she would do everything for him.

Her head came dimly closer, and weakly he kissed her again. Yet it was good to do that. It allowed him to stop thinking. It allowed him to put off everything.

He would explain to her later that he was not in the least serious about all this. Just then he heard her actually saying something about hoping to meet his mother, and a peculiar feeling of terror jumped in him. He would clear that up later, too; it was no use trying to argue with anyone in her present nervous state. And as though trying to forget what he had done by getting himself in deeper still, he began to make love to her with such force that she drew away from him, and got up murmuring:

"No, this is madness. We must stop. But I'll be here tomorrow. I'll see you tomorrow. I've got to go now."

She began to push her dishevelled hair into shape with perfect tranquillity; and this quality, following her hysterical outburst without gradations, made both these attitudes seem curiously unreal.

They went out into the silent street together. At her own

door, she said nothing, only giving him a long look of summary, and faintly smiling. He said good-night and turned and started homeward with an empty feeling at the pit of his stomach. Without having uttered a word of any intention, he could not shake off the feeling that he was a committed man.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THAT NIGHT, THOUGH he lay awake as usual, his mind was not tossed by his debts and anxieties. He was occupied instead in inventing one of those neat dialogues in which the imaginary answers of an opponent supply always the proper opening for a conclusive rejoinder. Only the fact that this dialogue had not taken place, and that in his instinct he knew it would never take place, left him unsatisfied before he collapsed into a few hours of exhausted sleep at dawn.

Nothing, indeed, could have been more different from the conversation he had devised than the one which actually took place when Miss Bass called on the following day.

When she arrived somewhat breathlessly at noon during her lunch hour, his heart sank, though he could not say he was surprised. He was surprised instead to discover Miss Bass was far more agreeable than he had supposed her in the watches of the night. Though the hectic brightness quivered still in her eyes, there was about her also a feeling of simple sense. His unwilling tolerance increased. She did not seem anxious to dodge any facts or even distort them, provided they were not about her. And this feeling of quiet practicality that so astonished him was accented by her erratic lapses into sentimentality every so often, so that her clarity was sharply set off by the nauseating pretentiousness which ran side by side with it.

They had lunch together in a basement tearoom nearby. With the indignant look of a captive taken by an unfair

stratagem, Giles slowly surveyed her. She was wearing a cheap, green felt cloche, spotted and apparently shrunken by rain, so that it appeared to bind her head painfully and gave her face an appearance of straining from it. She had some inappropriate bangles on her wrists, and her barbaric matching earrings were as sexless as weights. They suggested a device only to pull her ears down. Her lovely body was completely disguised by a shapeless silk blouse over a faintly plaid butterfly skirt, topped by a worn, grey woolen coat. Her pale skin did not look healthy; she conveyed the wrong kind of weakness.

Very carefully Giles began to describe his painful situation, and his impending ruin. He soon saw, to his dismay, that she seemed not to be disturbed or startled by these facts, but to know instinctively all about them and even to welcome them.

"I'll help you," she kept saying. "Of course you think just because I'm a woman, I can't do anything! Oh, you'll be surprised—you'll be glad too."

She bent a mawkish scrutiny upon him, and her tone shifted to a syrupy note. "Poor man—how tired you look! Never mind, you have me now."

That was the worst of it, he certainly did. How had she managed to insinuate herself into such an alliance after those few meetings? She had simply assumed things that were not so, that she must realize perfectly well were not so! Was she making a fool of him? Giles wondered hotly. He began to speak more bluntly, and noticing then that her face was rapidly growing more tense and the tempo of her breath was ominously accelerating, he stopped in alarm for fear she might make a scene even here in the restaurant, and taking back all he had said, said other things besides that he had not meant to say.

Alone that afternoon in his lonely office, it gradually dawned on him that, after all, no matter what she did or said, or even assumed, he was at least protected by his own failure. And when that afternoon she again said a little

pleadingly that she wanted to meet his mother soon, Giles unthinkingly agreed to arrange it.

For the next three days he strove to broach the subject to Mrs. Giles, but his tongue invariably clove to the roof of his mouth at the moment of blurting out the request. He had, too, an uneasy feeling that his mother knew perfectly well that something was up from the very fact that she asked him no questions whatsoever, and frequently appeared to be lost in her own reflections. He had besides been forced to delay his arrival each evening because of the visits of Miss Bass, and seldom reached home of late before six. Yet Mrs. Giles never asked for an explanation.

In this short space his knowledge of the superficial history of Miss Bass grew nearly complete. It was not very complicated. She had grown up in a small Massachusetts town, completed her education in Boston, taken a library course, and landed her job. After that nothing had happened to her. She had worked at it for seven lonely years. The painful realization of emptiness had been her only maturing experience. She had scarcely any relatives, but her middle-class, small-city environment was a cut above Giles' sordid upbringing. Her grammar was very precise, and her manners ladylike. It was plain that she thought herself a very superior person largely because of her sense of morality. But along with this there ran also a longing for excitement and emotional posturing so intense that she was prepared to make an exception of herself in a moral lapse, and forgive herself as a magnificently tragic figure.

But there was no encouragement from Will to do anything she might have considered spectacular. She adjusted herself instantly to a serenity that eased him. She was even able to be silent at times. He began to think more and more highly of her, and reassured himself with the illusion that actually she was asking for nothing.

However, he could not conceal his adventure from his mother any longer; Miss Bass had been at him again only today, asking him with an air of the greatest humility if

by any chance he were ashamed of her, a question that was quite unanswerable. He went home through a drizzling rain that night, grimly refusing to give himself even one more chance.

He hesitated on the landing of the tenement, screwing up his courage, and then, pushing open his own door with immense breeziness, he threw out, practically as he entered, some abrupt sentences that had a hollow, boastful noise.

"By the way, a girl I met recently . . . meant to tell you before . . . I'd like to have you meet her . . . just a friendly thing to do, of course. . . . Maybe tomorrow, you'd come to the office about five . . ."

"Of course, Will!" Mrs. Giles chirruped, her eyes resting on him with the brightest possible of smiles. "I'm sure she's a lovely girl—and just to think, your very first patient!"

Will's mouth fell open. "How did you know it was her?" he mumbled, for he had not cared to connect the identity of Miss Bass with the exasperating woman he had admitted having previously flung out of his office.

But Mrs. Giles did not bother to answer this. She looked down at her sleeve, and began to pluck some frayed strands from it.

"I don't want you to think," Will burst out, "that there's anything—that I mean in the least——"

In the midst of his floundering, she glanced up and nodded rapidly, as if he had already concluded.

"I think I'll take a little walk," she said genially. "I've been in all day."

"But it's raining."

She was already putting on her coat as if in haste. "Oh, I love the rain. I won't be long."

In the morning over their breakfast of weak black coffee and dry bread, he tried to bring up the subject, but Mrs. Giles had become infuriatingly obstinate. She answered every remark with complete and deliberate irrelevance, paying no

attention to anything he said. The conversation had the crazy quality of two intercut monologues.

"Well, are you coming over today or not?" he demanded wrathfully at last.

Her bird-like eyes flickered and she answered him finally with great sweetness in her tone. "Of course, dear, of course. I'll be there. Now run along; it's getting real late."

Early that morning, with his usual air of dropping out of the sky, George Galbraith arrived at the office. He had just landed, but said he had to go on to New York in a few minutes. Still, he'd be back in a couple of days.

"What news?" he now demanded, looking at Giles with a significant grin.

For a moment Giles almost thought that Galbraith, too, knew everything with the same disagreeable prescience as his mother. However, an instant's reflection told him this was not so. He was glad to escape having to confide in Galbraith about Miss Bass by plunging instead into a recital of his financial misfortunes.

The advent of Miss Bass had, indeed, made these more bearable by giving him something still more dire to think about. But things had now reached their final pitch. He had arrived at the end of them without a single plan. He could not bring himself to face the last unthinkable moment, a vision of his furniture piled on the street outside and his standing there, not knowing where to go. But perhaps something might happen to him; he might be run over, say, and so not have to worry at all any more.

Already he had been called up twice by the renting agent, and had said each time that he would send a check directly, it had merely slipped his mind. He had managed to pay the electricity bill, however, and had dared to look into his bankbook at last. It was as bad as he feared.

Galbraith gnawed his lip at this account. He muttered something about staking Giles for a month or two, but then demanded what good that would do.

"You've got to get the hell out of here immediately. When

I come back from New York, we'll have a little talk and find out what to do next. Meanwhile, have you got any ready money, or anything you can raise it on?"

"No, nothing. There's the farm my uncle left me, of course, but that's mortgaged up to the hilt as it is."

"Farm!" exclaimed Galbraith. "What farm?"

"Didn't I ever tell you?" Will said in surprise, and he began to describe Uncle Ed's legacy, and his own summary disposal of it. He noticed as he went on talking that Galbraith was looking at him with a stupefied air. Suddenly Galbraith began to swear.

"And you left all that—you threw that away—you came back here of your own free will to put yourself into this—this——"

He seemed unable to find an epithet expressive of his contempt for the wonderful office. He shook his head and got control of himself.

"Anyway, you've got nothing to worry about. You've got the house still—you can go back still—it's as simple as that."

"You actually think I ought to go there—practise in a little place like that?" Will mumbled.

"*Think?* You goddamn fool!"

Will's eyes were puzzled as if at an unexpected discovery. Slowly he began to smile. The simplicity of the solution that at a single blow disposed of all his fears came over him like a peaceful wave. Why had he not thought of it before? It had been in front of his nose all along. Perhaps he had known it subconsciously, and that was why he had made no plans. With happiness it dawned on him that it was what he was really meant to do, and what he now wanted to do. But he was unable to admit to Galbraith he had capitulated so quickly and happily.

"I'll—I'll think it over," he said gravely.

Galbraith lifted his fist in dumb show as if controlling a wish to strike him. Standing in the doorway with his overcoat on, torn between the desire not to miss his train and

the fierce wish to convince Will of the obvious, he continued to hurl abusive conclusions at him. Will listened with soft pleasure, keeping up a show of reluctance only in order to draw from Galbraith more arguments of which he was already delightedly convinced.

When Galbraith hauled himself away at last, Will gave himself up luxuriously to the first relief he had known in months. Already his imagination pictured his life in Vermont, a course that was now permitted him because he was forced to pursue it. Never mind that marble mansion he had promised his mother. It would come along some day; there would be another means of attaining that!

He looked at the clock, saw with regret it was after twelve, and heard at the same moment a ring at the door that could only be Miss Bass. He was glad that Galbraith had missed her, though why that was he could not say. He felt sure that Galbraith would not like her and might have shown his scorn at his having involved himself with the poor spinster.

Just then it occurred to him with a feeling of dread that he would have to break the news to her about his abrupt decision. What business was it of hers? he resentfully demanded. With a scowl he went to the door, thinking that of late life had resolved itself into merely one awkward disclosure after another. Why didn't they all leave him alone?

But the information about his mother's visit today appeared to satisfy Miss Bass sufficiently for the moment, and he put off telling her of his intention of leaving Boston for good. Maybe he could write her a letter about it later on, he thought, while he listened mournfully to her enthusiasm over the meeting that was to take place this afternoon.

"I'll just love her—I know I'll just love your mother!" she declared in a fatuous voice. "Do you think she will like me?"

Giles said gruffly he was sure she would, very much.

The meeting of the two women at five o'clock that day was obscurely embarrassing to him. To begin with, both of them seemed on this occasion to be doing an excessive amount of smiling, to be exchanging constantly half-arch, intimate looks that pretended to utter the inexpressible, and to be delivering themselves of bursting sounds that suggested a kind of persistent, enchanted squealing.

Will's snub-nosed face with its puckered eyes had the dignified look of a child who is not being taken seriously enough. In spite of the weakness that invariably develops guile and perceptiveness, he was not an intuitive man. Nevertheless, he saw that while this foolish, innocuous conversation, so loaded with exclamatory laughter, was not about anything at all, there was going on in front of him some delicate, but almost cold-blooded interchange. He gazed somberly at his mother, noticing how shabby her clothes had become. Something told him that she detested Miss Bass. And Miss Bass, for her part, conveyed the feeling of an opposing will that was armed and merciless.

As they continued their passages of knowing looks and ecstatically expressed trivialities, Will had the uncomfortable feeling of being no more than a kind of rope in some secret tug-of-war. The battle of two men over a woman may fill her with an atavistic sense of peace and security, but a man between two women is likely to experience only a shattering realization of his own insignificance.

A feeble rage possessed Will Giles. He tried to make himself shrewd and told himself grimly that he was all alone, and it was good. There then darted into his mind an expedient which carried him along in its rush. This was the time to explode his news, when he could be protected from each of them by the other!

And he abruptly interrupted the nonsensical conversation that was going on by announcing as if belligerently that he had decided to close the office up the very next week, and thereafter settle down in Vermont.

They were both certainly startled by the information. A

tell-tale pallor stole into Miss Bass's face. About her terror, and her effort to conceal any sign of this, there was something at last pitiful. Everything that was cheaply predatory about her, even her sentimentality, became dignified by honest emotion. It was her life that was slipping away from her; her one defiance of her empty fate had, in the end, come to nothing.

As for Mrs. Giles, she had a blank, puzzled aspect, like someone of weak intellect struggling to understand a complex idea. She looked down at her scuffed shoe tips almost as if in profound sadness. Lifting her head then, she protested in confusion:

"Why, Will, you can't mean this! Now?—Vermont?—After all you've done here?—Besides, how could we?—"

Her voice grew more and more agitated. Will had the extraordinary feeling that for some reason she was attempting to stop him from saying anything further, and trying to pretend, even, that he had not meant what he had already said. And now she all at once looked quickly and searchingly over at Miss Bass. An insipid smile had fixed itself on the spinster's lips. Though her bulging eyes had a sick look, they were quite steady.

"I think it's a wonderful idea, myself," she said with deliberation. "Perfectly wonderful—the very best thing!"

"But he doesn't want to!" Mrs. Giles cried, as if frightened of something. "He likes it here! He doesn't want to go there!"

Will did not even hear her. He was conscious of feeling ashamed of himself, as if he had committed a treacherous act. He moved uncomfortably in his chair and met Miss Bass's intent gaze.

"Of course, I'd run in to Boston quite often," he said, clearing his throat. "It's not very far, you know."

And his eyes, full of the cunning of cowardice, tried to trick her, tried to assure her of those lying declarations which his mother's presence fortunately protected him from saying, telling her he would certainly keep alive their false relationship and submit to her wish.

Something contemptuous seemed to pass across Miss Bass's plain features, lending them a kind of pride and superiority.

"No," she said sharply. "You will not come back again. Why should you? And it's the best thing you could possibly do."

Then she got up and said she must be going.

A distinct awkwardness, which they were all attempting to dissemble, was in the air as they parted. On the steps Miss Bass straightened Mrs. Giles' dingy coat collar with quick, light fingers, displaying that purely physical tenderness which a woman is able to show even her worst enemy.

As Will and his mother walked homeward through the twilight, he was silent. But Mrs. Giles kept up a steady stream of talk. It was now she who wished to discuss Miss Bass fully and deeply, and Will who longed to avoid the topic. She was so enthusiastic, and praised Miss Bass so enormously that Will nervously began to increase his pace, as if trying to run away from the conversation.

But it was not until they reached the tenement itself that Mrs. Giles gave him any rest. Then she spoke for the first time about his decision to return to Vermont.

"You've been thinking of it right along, haven't you?" she exclaimed tremulously. "And I never even guessed! Me and my bones that know everything!"

"It never came into my mind until today," he answered, as if indignantly rejecting undeserved credit. "It was Galbraith who made me see it was the only thing to do. He said——"

"George?" cried Mrs. Giles. "Is George back? You never told me!"

She lifted her head, looking up towards a dark sky. She smiled deeply, as if she were smiling at someone there.

Ironically and senselessly, in the next two days there came to Giles' office a whole handful of patients. One was an arthritic, well-to-do old lady, just back from a tropical cruise, who said Galbraith had recommended him highly; another was a fellow librarian of Miss Bass's, who suggested

Miss Bass herself ten faded years from now, hysterically confronting a menopause that was ending nothing; and there were two others also who appeared all unexpectedly and who had been sent by a good-natured staff doctor in Will's former hospital.

He was suddenly and bewilderingly busy. It was necessary to keep Miss Bass perched in the waiting room for almost an hour.

But she seemed glad for his sake, and there was a gentleness about her he had not recognized before. His heart smote him at her sacrificial goodness.

He had never liked her better than now when he was practically saying farewell. How idiotic he had been to fear her, how pusillanimous to refuse her the simple happiness of loving him!

And this changed attitude, coupled with the abrupt influx of patients that seemed to say the tide of his fortunes had turned at last, filled Giles with the greatest uneasiness about the decision he had embraced so hastily. Had he welcomed Galbraith's outraged insistence only because it offered a means of escaping from his difficulties here? Had he welcomed it even more, from his shadowy, preposterous alarm at the thought that Miss Bass sought to devour him?

Then upon the heels of these disquieting uncertainties a letter arrived for him that had the force of a thunderclap. It was from a country real-estate dealer and conveyed the astonishing information that an offer of twelve hundred dollars had been made for his equity in the village house.

Will's hand shook so much that the stiff paper sent out a scaly rustle. He read the letter in a second, as if photographing it, and then he did not want to look at it again, as if he were frightened of it.

His brain raced. Twelve hundred dollars—a fortune! . . . Why, with such a sum he could continue on here, if he wished, for another four months, maybe five. In four months there would certainly be many more patients, now that he had turned the corner. If he stayed and won—and how

could he not win?—he would have been proved justified in his original resolution; he would have proved to everyone he had been right.

Unable to sustain any further the arguments going on crazily in his head, Will suddenly decided to tell his mother the news, if only to hear another voice besides the silent one throbbing so inconsistently in his ears.

It was almost twelve o'clock; but the elderly lady with arthritis, whom Galbraith had sent him, was not coming until one. He was too impatient to walk, and on an impulse caught a cab. He watched the meter guiltily, seeing the first sands of his fortune run out. He had now only eleven hundred and ninety-nine dollars and forty cents left! He laughed, and looked out boldly upon the passing crowd.

He had certainly meant to do no more than tell Mrs. Giles of the extraordinary offer, without in the least intending to act upon it. But when her eyes fell away from his excited face, and she listened to his declaration that now they actually did not have to leave Boston if they did not want to, she said meekly: "You must do as you think best, Will dear," in a tone so expressive of resignation as to set all his nerves quivering in revolt.

She wanted him to go to Vermont, because, like Galbraith, she thought that that was all he was good for! He was despised and pitied by them all! He reddened to his hair line and doubled his fist. And giving himself up to the luxury of a moment of violence, without even caring what happened as a result, he heard himself saying in a loud, bullying tone:

"Well, it's just what I *am* going to do! I'm going to stay right where I am—that's what I've wanted all along!"

Mrs. Giles reflected with sadness. All at once she murmured irrelevantly: "Has Miss Bass any money, do you know?"

Will was startled by the abruptness and inconsistency of the question. He felt irascible at his mother's inability to follow anything.

"How should I know?" he exclaimed. "And what's that got to do with what I've been talking about? Anyway, I gotta be going back now—gotta lotta patients coming in!"

When he was on the street, he experienced an enervated sensation. He was sorry he had lost his temper at his mother—he would be especially nice to her tonight. But he had committed himself; he had said those words, and there was no way of going back on them now. Ah, but did he want to? In the end she would see he was right; she would be glad. Some day she would be living in a marble mansion, not in a village farmhouse!

"It'll be all right," he muttered. "Sure, it'll be all right this time!"

Miss Bass appeared early that afternoon. Somewhat less fiercely, Giles told her what had happened and what he now planned.

But her reception of his news, which he secretly expected to suffuse her with delight, made him almost as angry as his mother's mute disapproval.

"Are you quite sure?" she asked solemnly. "Think!" She closed her eyes as if to show him how this act was to be achieved. "You may be making the most important decision you will ever be called upon to make!"

Yes, he was right; they were all against him, every one. And there was still Galbraith to be faced. Galbraith would not spare his feelings in expressing his own opinion. In imagination, Will heard his loud, indignant and incredulous exclamation, saw the disgusted look on his face. He'd show Galbraith, too; stand up to him for once. Who was Galbraith, anyway? An obscure ship's doctor, trying to advise others after he had failed himself! Abruptly, it occurred to him that Galbraith was due back today. The last thing he had said was that he hoped to finish his business in time to get back here late this afternoon. He might be along at any minute.

Will decided that he must get rid of Miss Bass immediately.

"Look here," he said bluntly. "I'm expecting a friend. I hate to hurry you off, but I gotta talk to him, see? It's about a lot of things——"

He was relieved by the mildness with which she accepted her dismissal. She nodded, saying of course she understood; next, giving him a quick, light kiss on his cheek, she stood off for a minute surveying him with a look that somehow suggested the critical appraisal of a piece of property, and then went quickly.

Will sat down. He felt very depressed. Why didn't Galbraith show up? He longed nervously to have the tussle over. Maybe he could even convince Galbraith he was right. At any rate, there would be nothing of that odiously personal quality in the argument, which was the peculiar mark of an argument with a woman.

The bell rang at last. Answering it almost with eagerness, Giles stood stupefied when he had flung open the door. In the dim light he saw a handsome face whose enormous familiarity had for an instant the opposite effect of seeming strange. Beyond the young man confronting him on the doorstep, he made out the dark shape of a large roadster parked in the street. At the same moment a voice, full of energy, impatience, and illimitable self-assurance, struck upon his ear.

"Well, aren't you going to let me in? My finger hurts like hell, and you said once you'd give us all free medical care. Or have you forgotten?"

"Julian!" Giles exclaimed excitedly. "Well, I'll be damned!"

Smiling delightedly, he led the way to the inner office, as Julian Gamble, pouring out a flood of unrelated interjections, comments and explanations, anxiously held out a hand on which the index finger showed a slight swelling. He had just come down from Bar Harbour, he said, driven all the way, bound for New York. But he had scratched his finger somehow on the trip; it had become infected, and so when he reached Boston, he had looked up Giles in the telephone book, and here he was.

Will at once examined the injured finger and saw there was nothing seriously wrong. While Julian, with his fine, arrogant eyes, his air of large but perfectly unaffected superiority, peered all around and continued his account of himself, in which the utterance of nothing was made to seem something by the vitality he poured into it. Giles lanced the finger to an outburst of moans, oaths, and abuse, then painted and bandaged it.

"You'll live, all right," he said, grinning still. He cocked his head on one side to look at his visitor. "Well, Julian, I'm certainly surprised! Tell me all about everything."

Julian Gamble had not changed greatly. His good looks were as striking as ever. But his expression suggested that his capacity for curiosity had lessened, and only in this way could he be said to have become more mature.

His hair had been knocked by the wind of his drive into a crisp tangle. He was wearing a torn sweater, Harris-tweed knickerbockers with golf stockings, and Scotch-grain shoes. But though everything he had on seemed indifferently ripped or soiled, it was easy to see that these clothes had originally cost a good deal. They made an exact contrast to the clerkly neatness of Will's cheap serge suit, his high black shoes, and the faded shirt on which the collar had obviously been turned.

Julian, shaking his painful finger a little now and then, continued to walk up and down with senseless restlessness and, needing no invitation, continued to emit information explosively.

Will had merely to listen, and he did so with a happy smile on his face, warmed by his nearness to someone with whom he had shared the most exciting experience of his life.

But no such reminiscent emotions appeared to stir Julian. It was almost as if he had forgotten. The zeal with which he now talked, Giles saw, would have been expended just as freely upon the most casual acquaintance. He had probably talked like this to every filling-station attendant on the road whenever he had stopped for gas. For Julian

not only seemed to talk solely about himself, but exclusively to himself as well.

"Christ, but you hurt me!" he now exclaimed, holding up his finger gingerly. "Haven't you got a drink around here?"

When Giles said he was sorry, Julian grudgingly admitted he had something in the car.

"It's in a bag in the rumble. Bring it in for me, will you?"

Will nodded and said, "Of course, right away."

"Good old Giles!" Julian sang out with insolent patronage.

But Giles did not even resent this as he went outside and lugged a heavy bag out of the shining, black car—an imported English Bentley which, he reflected with awe, could not have cost a penny less than ten thousand dollars.

By the time he had returned, lugging Julian's heavy bag, Julian was skimming the amusement page of a morning newspaper he had picked up in the office. He now read aloud the advertisement of a popular musical show that had just come to Boston, saying that he knew the principal comedian very well.

"Let's take it in when we've had a couple of drinks and something to eat," he said. "Then we'll go backstage and I'll get hold of Charley. How about it? Got anything else on tonight?" He added hastily with a flash of his familiar niggardliness, "We'll go Dutch, of course."

"Oh, you'd better leave me out," said Will uneasily. "I have to get up early, you know. But why don't you go, and then come around again in the morning?"

Gamble looked disgustedly at him. "For God's sake," he said savagely, "is that all you ever do—work?"

He poured out a stiff drink for himself and paused to watch narrowly as Will put a little whiskey in his own glass. But almost as soon as he had downed the drink, Julian's good temper magically returned. He drank again, and the whiskey began to fill his voice with something brutal and loud, and to aggravate the stream of blasphemy and obscenity which acted merely as a sort of punctuation in his talk.

Will inquired if he ever saw anything of Adam or Alfred, or if he had heard from them recently.

Julian said impatiently: "Oh, Zach's teaching in that Jew college—he's a Bolshevik like all those Jews, of course. Last time I saw him he wanted to talk about baseball. Baseball! What right has *he* to talk about baseball! And Mallory's married and a parson—you heard about that, of course—the goddamn fool!"

"You haven't got married yourself then?" Will asked with a smile.

"The hell I haven't!" Julian exclaimed, pouring himself a third big drink, and then passing the bottle after an instant of reluctance. "Why, I got my Paris divorce only last year. Don't you ever read the papers? It made one hell of a stink!"

And he began to describe his brief, hectic marriage to a celebrated opera singer, with a kind of childish pride, discussing the most intimate details of the episode with a coarse frankness.

Revelling in the reminiscent enjoyment of his own destructive courses, Julian was now launched upon his disgraceful history. It seemed he had been living all over the Riviera in the past few years, altering his background and his society by an unhesitating surrender to every whim. Indications of startling extravagances were mingled at the same time with the pettiness of his eccentric stinginess. It was a tale of ceaseless waste, of pleasures made revolting by hysterical excess, and suggested to Giles' middle-class moralistic mind an impressionistic medley of vintage champagnes, costly and seductive mistresses in pearl necklaces, rococo gambling casinos, spendthrift entertainments, magnificent yachts, Bugatti racing cars, exiled and half-lunatic Russian grand dukes, prodigal Argentine millionaires, and mercenary Parisian music-hall favourites—somewhat like the conceptions of high life embodied in flashy fiction.

How different, at any rate, it was from his own plodding, careworn existence with its goading economies and paltry worries! He tried to feel aloof from this debauched young

man who was his old friend, and to assure himself that he pitied such a life, but in his heart he felt only the pangs of humility and envy.

"But what are you going to do now?" he asked. "You say you've just come down from Bar Harbour. Are you going abroad again?"

"No, it's New York this time. I'm going to find myself a studio. I can paint like a fool. Did you know that, Giles? I'm going to show them a thing or two. Hell, I can do anything I want that way. You'll see!"

Wistfully, Giles looked at him. He felt quite grateful when Julian, with condescending casualness, now asked him about himself.

Nervously, Giles began to describe his own career, presenting it in a rosy light, and beginning to lie in his anxious longing to impress Julian about how well he was doing.

Julian did not seem to doubt this. He shook his head.

"God, you're lucky—you don't know how lucky you are! Peace—that's what you've got—absolute peace! *You* don't want a goddamn thing—why, all this actually contents you! Yes, you're a lucky bastard!"

Giles winced at the contempt contained in this praise; he saw that Julian sincerely pitied him without thinking much about him. Indeed, it was presently apparent that Julian was only half listening to his nervous account, in which even his largest boasts and falsifications sounded now so wretchedly meagre.

Julian sauntered over and clambered on the black, cloth-covered examining table, declaring suddenly he was all in, dead to the world. He lay back silently, flicking the ashes of his cigarette on the floor. He grunted with satisfaction, as if the dardness of the table were somehow restful. Gradually his eyes closed, opened alertly, then slowly closed again. His exhilaration from the rapidly gulped whiskey seemed to have given way abruptly to exhaustion. His breathing grew thicker. Will went over and took the ciga-

rette out of his fingers. He continued talking of himself a little longer, and then broke off to stare. Julian was asleep.

Will stood looking down at him. In spite of Julian's boldly revealed character, he could not help smiling affectionately at him. The delicacy of the features, the long, graceful and careless body, the whipped hair with its dark lustre, and the magnificent throat composed a beauty which, accompanied by a virile brutality and the attractions of his egotistic force, must be exciting to most women, arresting to most men.

At last he turned out the light. He tiptoed away, and closed the door softly behind him. Julian would probably sleep there all night. He would leave him alone until morning. It was too late for Galbraith to turn up now. Galbraith had probably been detained longer than he had expected. Or, if he did come back to Boston, he would go directly to the tenement at this hour. What would Galbraith think of Julian? It might be interesting to have them meet.

When he reached home, Will burst out at once about his unexpected visitor. Mrs. Giles, as if glad to avoid any repetition of their disagreeable quarrel in the morning, eagerly embraced the topic.

"And he's staying there all night!" she exclaimed. "Just imagine! When he could go to the best hotel and get the best room in it if he wanted—as grand as the Pope of Rome!" She clicked her tongue at the vagaries of the rich.

Next morning, when Giles reached his street, he noticed at once that the shining Bentley was no longer parked before his door. No doubt Julian had awakened earlier and gone out for some breakfast. But as soon as he let himself in, Will knew that Julian had gone for good.

The apartment was nearly wrecked. Everything in it was in the utmost confusion. The mattress and cushions of the sofa had been dumped upon the floor to make a bed there. There were glasses and paper cups in every room, some of them still partially filled. Innumerable cigarette butts were scattered about, many of them dirtied with lipstick. A

number of them had been wantonly snuffed out on the furniture itself. Even a picture had been senselessly pulled from the wall and lay in its broken glass on the floor. The stale smell of tobacco, alcohol, and perfume hung in the place, giving it a disgusting reek.

With a mournful look Will stooped and picked up a program of the musical show that Julian had mentioned last night. He read the names of the cast gravely, and dropped it into a basket. Scarcely with any resentment, and with something submissive in his attitude, he began to try to set his shamefully abused office to rights. It took him a long while. He opened the windows and let in the fresh air. He threw away some broken glasses and tried to sweep up with a whiskbroom. Just as he was all through, the phone rang.

A bird-like voice struck jarringly on his ear.

"Tony, you no come home today? Gotta da good spaghet!"

It was his mother, who of late had added to her repertoire of humour some atrocious imitations of foreign accents.

He said nothing of what had happened, but listened patiently until she was through. He felt horribly depressed. He was filled with a longing to assert himself, to lose the cloudy indefiniteness of outline by which his life seemed bounded. He must become somebody. He must be a success!

All at once he wondered whether he ought not go to Vermont after all. But he had said he wouldn't; he had said it in such a way that he could not endure admitting his own private vacillation. Whatever happened, he must not be weak! He had said it, and he would stick to it.

He jutted his round, amiable chin out and held it protruded like that until it began to ache faintly. Then, with a determined air, he took out a sheet of letterhead paper and wrote a curt answer to the unknown lawyers to say he was willing to close with their client's offer for the Vermont property, provided the matter were concluded immediately.

Bareheaded, he took the letter out to the street and strode

to the nearest mailbox. It was going to be a warm day. Summer had plunged down upon the town with no warning. The seashore and mountain resorts were probably already filling up. Here in the city the streets began to throw off once more an oppressive, smoking atmosphere, and everything was very still, almost lifeless, in the early-morning heat.

At the mailbox he poked his letter swiftly into the slot with a kind of defiant relish. But as the released trap banged shut, his hand made an involuntary, half-frightened gesture as if to retrieve the note. He felt indignant at this unconscious betrayal, and taunted his treacherous alarm with the fact that it was too late now; he had committed himself irretrievably! Beneath his troubled eyes his mouth assumed a deep and jaunty smile.

He sauntered back to his office. There was really nothing more to do for the moment. Going to the window, he looked out vacantly upon the street he had just left. At the far corner before the building which housed half a dozen other doctors, three cars were standing already. Some patients were even now coming out, others just arriving. Giles tore his gaze away with an effort. He looked across the way at the windows of the house opposite. It was from one of those windows he had first noticed Miss Bass feverishly peering out at him months ago, months and months ago.

He thrust his hands deeply into his pockets. He began to whistle softly and monotonously to himself.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE HEAT THAT seeped into Boston that listless Summer day deepened in tone like an infusion along the entire Atlantic seaboard.

New York sweltered, too; the pavements were hot as

roofs; and in their offices, men of business worked in their shirt sleeves in the pathways of whirring fans. Great numbers straggled towards the beaches in search of relief, and all the Long Island roads and the Long Island trains were crowded.

On one such train, that followed an itinerary to the cheap resorts and settlements which extend in a fringe around Jamaica Bay, Alfred Zacharias was sitting.

Except in the mere intensification of his early characteristics, he had not actually changed. His small, moist mouth, sensual yet delicate; his thick nose slapped on his face as uncarven as a lump; the spiral, dustcoloured hair affixed to his scalp like a glued wig; and his watchful, intelligent and resentful eyes, appeared exactly the same as when they had presented themselves beneath a Chief Petty Officer's cap.

The school term was over. Two years ago Alfred had become what he had set out to be: a college instructor in mathematics. But this occupation did not interest him as much as he had supposed. On the contrary, he was finding it more and more irritating to repeat monotonous courses in trigonometry and calculus to the bright, ambitious young Jews who composed almost entirely the student body of the free college.

He had, actually, no patience with pure mathematics. He was annoyed by the aspirations of a science so romantic that it even attempted to explain the universe with a formula. Itself the greatest of philosophies, it had not led him to other philosophies. Instead, he was excited only by those political speculations which imagine that by improving the external conditions of man they may simultaneously improve his spirit.

He had become by this time a convinced radical of the most advanced variety. Although the circumstances of his own family had bettered in the flourishing aftermath of the war, this did not lessen his bitterness.

There was more money coming into the household these days. Two of his younger brothers, Hyman and Jack, had

suddenly shot up, left school, and gone almost greedily to work—Hyman, at fifteen, the clerk in a grimy tobacco and stationery store; and Jack, with his thick neck and face as sanguine as a round of beef, trundling a jobber's handcart for a firm of West Side furriers.

"If Astor done it," he said proudly the night he came home with his first pay, "why not me? I'm smart, too!"

The rest of the family beamed upon him indulgently.

Mrs. Zacharias herself, as shapeless as a wad, moved about these days with a look of sleepy contentment, and gorged upon a diet of grease and sugar. She escaped the limitations of race by belonging to a universal type whose females are to be discovered in all ranks, all lands, and doubtless all ages. With them she shared a stupidity so abysmal that it could not be said she had ever had the remotest understanding, or even the slightest awareness, of any activities outside of breeding and feeding. Yet within these animal limits she was impressive, and she had an animal's formidable gifts. No pushcart pedlar lived who could cheat her, and once she had disposed of a sentimental widow who had shown dim signs of interest in Mr. Zacharias with the speed of a wildcat leaping from a jungle branch.

The family had now moved to a larger, slightly more pretentious apartment in the same quarter, where Alfred was enabled to have his own room. Here he kept his books, and came home to study late hours for the doctorate, which must be the first step towards an assistant professorship.

But his thoughts constantly flowed away from considerations of space-time to things that were closer to his emotions. He saw that, if his family had gone up in the world, the capitalistic classes had at the same time advanced in power and wealth, and so the disproportionate relationship remained precisely the same.

That year the Americans were buying the best of everything. They were patronizing the theatre in huge numbers; purchasing things that merely served to amuse them like toys for a day or so; swarming extravagantly abroad in

mobs, or rushing off on briefer, spendthrift holidays to Havana or Bermuda, mainly to outwit the Prohibition Amendment.

But this state of affairs only heightened the discrepancy of the poverty that ran side by side with it. In vain, men were wandering the land begging for the humblest work; bitter strikes raged everywhere, and wretched sharecroppers in the cotton and tobacco belts could scarcely earn enough to feed themselves.

How long was this economic rottenness to be endured? Alfred had already read Marx and Friedrich Engels and a number of others. And that Winter he drifted into a loosely formed but engrossing association with others who agreeably seemed to feel just as he did.

At first this was limited to a few other members of the college faculty, men like Dr. Irving Fineman, the economics professor, for instance, who fell into the habit of dropping in late afternoons for casual talks in one of the lunchrooms nearby. There was much dogmatic but uninformed discussion of the two figures who called themselves Lenin and Trotsky; of the Third International, which had just exploded like a weak squib in the thundering commonplaces of the day; of the strikes among garment workers and Pennsylvania coal miners; of the persecutions and cynical trials of agitators taking place here and there around the country. But the vague meetings constantly swelled and by an unspoken agreement took on finally the character of an organization. Soon some of the regular habitués brought strangers and these in turn brought others. One of the freed agitators was a guest of honour, and borrowed money from all of them to continue his work. Several people who had actually been to Russia brought back exciting news of the astonishing things that were happening there.

Gradually the informal meetings began to take place downtown in order to be nearer the open-air speakers in Union Square and the welcoming warmth of the Greenwich Village quarter. Here they found many sympathizers, though

these did not appear to care much what their protest was about, so long as they protested.

Alfred by this time had discarded the pretences of being a mere Socialist. That was no longer one of the bogey words, but expressed now only a weak liberalism, as respectable, as mildly defiant, as tenderly erratic as vegetarianism.

Numbers of rather frowsy but intense girls joined the movement, and many members of the vast, voiceless army who suffer aspirations without the cleverness to embody these. They seemed to be drawn by the romantic suggestions of a scorned cause, or, perhaps, by a longing to feel different at any cost. One and all were fiercely certain there could be no more poetry, no more music, or any other expression henceforth that did not concern itself solely with the class war.

This constantly enlarging world was now joined timidly by several quite rich people. They were mostly young also, inheritors of large estates, who were imaginative enough to feel guilty about this, like Miss Rosamund Ransom, a very tall girl with myopic, solemn eyes, who had a select number of the others up to her large Park Avenue apartment, and there wavered between a showy pride in giving them the best of everything, and a timid, apologetic air in being able to do so.

But more irritatingly paradoxical was the resistance to be encountered among some of the very poorest and most miserable. It was unthinkable that conservatism was a kind of temperament that had nothing to do with circumstances. Well, these, too, must be destroyed, Alfred thought grimly.

In the variety of such activities he was absorbed and happy for another year. He began to begrudge his own sleep in his obsessed pleasure, and often sat up in smoky, dirty studios wrangling and expounding for half the night. It was in this way he met, among others, Jacob Eagle.

Eagle was at that time a lean, dirty young man with a round head perched like a billiard ball balanced upon a cue. His eyes, half closed in the simulation of a lazy look,

watched everything with a kind of villainous alertness, like a thief through the chinks of a shutter. When he spoke in his hoarse, slightly affected voice, it was to express a conceit which, though magnificent, was also insincere and hence obnoxious.

He informed Alfred that he was writing a play.

"A great play," Eagle added slowly. "I couldn't write any other kind, of course. In fact, that's all this whole thing is about—the plays I'll write from it."

He gave a disagreeable laugh, and turned his faintly reddish eyeslits on Zacharias with a projection of belligerence and contempt.

But Zacharias felt no resentment, or even hostility, though he promptly insulted him as a matter of policy. Eagle seemed quite pleased by this, and hung about him most of the evening, and never failed afterwards to greet him with a kind of scornful warmth at any meeting where both were present.

Meanwhile, Alfred's family, which had at first regarded his fiery rebelliousness with a kind of awe, was now becoming plainly upset by the course things were taking. Alfred did not fail to show he despised them for their supine gratitude for their improved circumstances, their ignorant acceptance of the manipulation of their fate by something that dared to call itself Providence.

The little tailor looked mutely at his brilliant, antagonistic son with beseeching, frightened eyes. Mrs. Zacharias was less silent and less disturbed.

"What you need, Alfred," she said placidly, "is a good wife. It's time you got married already."

Alfred made an irritable gesture. He kept his thoughts to himself, and offered no account of his comings and goings. Only in his classes did he attempt to win converts.

Here the least allusion could set him off, and he declaimed his principles so ceaselessly that his course, where everything but mathematics was taught, soon became one of the joke courses of the college. It was said that anyone could get a

passing mark from Alfred Zacharias by merely pretending an interest in radicalism.

The most effective of all Alfred's arguments was an unspoken one. Since the movement proclaimed an intention of abolishing all race discrimination forever, it had taken on a subtle identity as a sort of renescent Judaism. And this, too, Alfred's angry declarations almost unconsciously pointed out.

While he was thus absorbed by a fanatic preaching of revolution, more powerful persons were engaged in preaching just as hotly against it. Even the staid and glossy weekly magazines railed and warned of the menace that was gathering. Cartoons of bewhiskered figures brandishing dripping knives became quite commonplace, and were highly flattering to the new movement because of their indications of alarm.

One evening, as another Spring came on, there was a big meeting in a downtown hall. Alfred, along with Dr. Fineman, several of the latest returned investigators from Russia, and various others, found himself on one of the hard cane-bottomed chairs on the speakers' platform. He gazed with quivering satisfaction at the crowded hall, and the straining, humourless faces lifted there. Many present had come up from experiences not dissimilar from his own, and nearly all of them carried the stigmata of an education painfully acquired. There was something groping in most of their faces, yet voracious and truculent. A number of the men wore the clothes of various workers with the aggressive suggestions of a warlike uniform. The women were mainly unkempt.

Alfred spoke briefly. He was not a good public talker, either pouring out his words in rushes without any pause, or halting awkwardly to search for expression. But his clenched fists and deadly earnestness made him popular. He sat down wiping his forehead, and then Irving Fineman rose.

Fineman was very elegant, his voice suave and persuasive.

Though he said nothing new, he managed to make stale things agreeable to hear all over again.

But though the audience applauded and stamped in agreement, supposing themselves inspired by lofty motives and devoted to the ageold cause of the equality of man, it was clear they were actually devoted to the still older cause of a transfer of power.

That was what their intoxicated and angry faces said: the only conditions they wished to improve were their own, and the only injustice they resented was the injustice against themselves.

After the meeting was over, Alfred walked up Fifth Avenue a long way with Dr. Fineman. It was a beautiful Spring evening. It had been raining a little but now had cleared. A soft mist hung around the street lamps.

Fineman talked of the meeting in his quiet way. But all at once he mentioned that next Autumn he would be gone, and seemed surprised that Alfred had not heard about this. He then explained that he had been offered an important chair in one of the Western universities.

Alfred had an uneasy, startled feeling. He realized at once that Fineman had had to pull wires for that appointment, had been carefully playing the politics of scholarship right along, in the midst of his Communistic activities. He had not been so unpractical as to let anything interfere with his real interests.

Then in a friendly way Fineman warned Alfred to watch out, his neglect of his classes was passing the stage of a joke; it was being noticed and commented upon unfavourably. Zacharias had not a word to answer. In a revulsion of feeling, he almost smote his brow. What had he been thinking about? He was filled with a gust of panic, so vivid that he was too frightened to examine it.

Like lightning he perceived it would be advisable to become immediately as inconspicuous as possible. He ought to get to work, too, and try to make up for lost time. This Summer he would do that. He would cut out all his meetings

for a while and go to work on a thesis. Yes, at once! He went to bed that night with the determination bred by his forebodings.

It was shortly after this that he received an invitation from his Uncle Harry Silverstein to spend the Summer at his bungalow in Edgemere.

It was there he was now bound this sweltering day. He was relieved to be quitting the dark heat of the city, even though he looked forward gloomily to work which was distasteful to him.

He gazed out at the houses swimming past. They had been growing more and more dilapidated in the last few minutes, some of them appearing no better than shacks that lifted themselves on stilts out of the discoloured, shallow water. Here and there dredging barges could be seen, and on the horizon in an enervated way there rose smudges from invisible factories. The tide rolled grapefruit halves and a scum of refuse and seepage along shores that were as uninviting as swamps. In this noisome region, even the incorruptible sea appeared to have been corrupted at last by the persistence of man.

But gradually these appearances improved, and some slightly superior dwellings came into view. All at once the train was passing through the streets of a town, and then came to its final halt. Far Rockaway—the end of the line.

Alfred reached down his bag, heavy with the wearisome mathematical works he meant to study, and began to ease his way outside. He saw his Uncle Harry, his thick red lips encased voluptuously around a Perfecto, and his thick, rubbery body enveloped in a semi-sleeveless sport shirt of a purplish hue, grinning at him from the platform, and advanced to greet him.

“Your Aunt Rose said I was to buy you a little lunch in a restaurant, on account of what it’s so late,” Uncle Harry explained; “so come along.”

Making a great show of a tug-of-war, he insisted on carrying Alfred's bag, and led the way from the station to a lunchroom across the street. They sat down at one of the white-tiled tables, and a waitress sidled up to them and held out a couple of carbon-copied menus. Uncle Harry waved his away with his cigar.

"It's only my nephew who's eating," he explained genially. "I couldn't hold a thing, girlie, not if you was to give me the place. Now, pick anything you want, Alfred—don't worry about the expense—I got plenty to pay for everything. Only don't order no fish—it's what New York can't use up—and after two days it's got whiskers on it."

Alfred frowned over the menu, while the waitress, whom he had as yet not even glanced at, stood over him with her pencil poised. But this did not hurry him in the least, or make him in any way nervous, as he considered a familiar listing of stock, American-restaurant dishes.

His expression now suggested the darkest anticipations; and it took him a long time to make up his mind before he ordered some chicken soup with matzoth balls, a combination salad, and a pot of tea, ignoring his uncle's loud demands to have more, much more.

The waitress dropped her pad into her pocket, and went off briskly. Alfred's eyes rested vaguely on her buttocks that made shore, pendulumlike motions as she walked and her somewhat vulgarly curved legs. He was recalled by Uncle Harry's coarse, genial voice:

"How's every little thing, Alfred? What you been up to, huh? It's long since I got a good look at you, though I seen your poppa and your mamma only coupla weeks ago."

Zacharias said he was working hard these days, and that one of the reasons he had come down here was to work still harder, so that maybe in a year or two he might be made an assistant professor.

"What happens then?" said Uncle Harry, displaying considerable interest, as he rolled his cigar juicily about between his lips.

Alfred understood this question perfectly. "Oh, nothing, except that then I can begin trying for a full professorship."

Uncle Harry, narrowing his eyes, asked what that elevation would pay in money, and when he heard, shook his head with surprise and disparagement.

"That ain't no business to be in!" he declared firmly. "Why, I gotta chief projectionist gets just as much right now—a no-good feller, who is most always drunk, but anyhow he don't belong to no union. In my business I could hire ten professors if I wanted to. Didn't your poppa ever tell you what I take in every day?"

Alfred's food arrived. He smiled at the waitress, studying her a little. She had a common, high-coloured Irish face. Then he began to eat, listening silently but with a strange mixture of scorn and respect to Uncle Harry's blissful account of his steadily mounting success.

His uncle, it seemed, had managed in only the past week to secure the lease of still another and larger Brooklyn theatre, and he described his tactics in these negotiations with an irresistible relish.

"I stole it, that's what I done, Alfred, absolutely! I had them all up to my house, see? There was two lawyers there, and a lot of fellers who thought they was smart. We'll iron everything out in a little friendly talk like gentlemen, I says, and maybe have a coupla drinks. So I got some bottles of genuine stuff—I gotta drink it myself, see, so I made sure it was O. K.—and then I had Milton, my eldest, come in with a tray, and the highballs all fixed on it. Only there was one glass bigger than the rest—all the others was just the same size. So Milton serves me last, which is polite, and of course nobody wants to let on he's a pig, and so the big glass is left for me. Well, what do you think? In the big glass, Alfred, there wasn't no more than a teaspoonful of booze, while all the others was double drinks! So after four or five rounds, maybe, everybody is stewed, see, with the exception of your smart Uncle Harry. And then when they can't think fast no more, and don't half know what they're

doing, your Uncle Harry sits back and trims 'em! How do you like that, huh?"

Uncle Harry had visibly swelled a little in the process of telling this story. Under his opened shirt collar, with its exaggerated, sweeping lapels, a portion of hairy, perspiring chest could be seen. His big face was wreathed in a smile of pride and he chuckled with a self-appreciation about which there was something agreeable. It was possible that Uncle Harry enjoyed his own ingenuity almost as much as the object which this attained, and that he was, in his own way, a kind of sportsman.

But now his expression grew serious, as abruptly as a child's. He blew out a puff of smoke, and pointed a finger like a club at his nephew.

"Alfred," he said sententiously, "I always said you was from my side of the family, and got brains, even though your momma ain't nothing to boast about that way. But I don't mind telling you right out, I hate to see a bright young feller like you wasting your time in the Professor business. You've had a lotta fun, and that's O. K., but it's time you settled down now and was serious."

Alfred was probing his salad with a scowl of dissatisfaction. Wilted string beans, several quarterings of coarse-skinned tomatoes, and some leaves of seared lettuce had been mixed together with an imitation cotton-seed-oil mayonnaise, and had not even been chilled. He said in a curt way, considering actually only the disappointing salad:

"What do you think I ought to do, then?"

"I was coming to that," said Uncle Harry gravely. "I was thinking, Alfred, as how I might even make you an offer to come into my business myself."

Zacharias looked up at him sharply. He had determined upon coming down here to say nothing of the political theories which agitated him with such religious zeal, for on Uncle Harry that would be an exasperating waste of effort. He restrained, therefore, a contemptuous reply to his Uncle's kindly meant offer, thinking sombrely what a gulf stretched

between him and this other, middle-aged Jew of his own blood. Why, Uncle Harry was asking him to relinquish his position as an intellectual, to give up all his principles as a revolutionary, in order to serve a medium that preached above everything else the hypocritical morality and false desirability of capitalistic conditions; and he was asking this, moreover, in the idea that he was conferring an enormous favour!

Uncle Harry, waiting for a moment for some comment or reaction, went on unruffled without one.

"Listen to me, Alfred, you can't make no mistake by going into the entertainment business. There's people will see a show when they ain't got nothing to eat. And I don't mind telling you thousands of young men would jump at the chance like what I'm giving you. You shoulda seen your poppa smile when I told him——"

Alfred gave a short, wrathful laugh. "Oh, so he put you up to this!" he exclaimed. "That's why you invited me down here, huh? Well, maybe you better fix those high-balls again!"

Uncle Harry affected an air of hurt surprise at this outburst, but it was clear that the promise of opposition filled him with delight.

"Alfred, it ain't what I'd expect of you—to say things like that about your poppa! He is a good man—maybe not a smart man—but a good man. Though I don't say Bella couldn't have done better. And you ought to know you got him nervous by the way you been acting. 'Now don't you worry, Sam,' I said to him. 'I'll talk to Alfred—he's a young feller, but he's no fool, Sam.' Yes, that's just the exact words I said to your poppa, you can ask him yourself if you don't believe me."

Zacharias was so infuriated by this revealment of a family conspiracy against him that he forgot all about his resolve to be discreet.

"Look here, Uncle Harry!" he cried fiercely. "Have you any idea what's going on in the world today? Haven't you

even heard about what's been happening in Russia?"

"Well," said Uncle Harry, "all I know is Sol Carnowsky was telling me that a lot of his relatives in Russia are buying up property in all them other countries at a price what is practically stealing, now the exchange is so good."

Alfred's temper began to crack, and he was goaded still more by the suspicion that much of this goading was not as innocent as it seemed, but on the contrary was maliciously deliberate. He now completely lost his head. In a rising voice and in wildly incoherent utterances he declaimed his principles, hurling at his Uncle a series of follies, contradictions and affirmations. Uncle Harry's voice immediately became equally loud and abusive.

"If I'd ever thought you was going to turn out like this," he cried, "I'd never have paid for that trip I took your momma and the whole family on, when you was stuck in that submarine! One hundred and seventeen dollars it cost me in solid cash, what with the best rooms and the best of everything! And I ain't never seen a dime of it back!"

He shook his head with a virtuous, imposed look, and it was plain that he actually conceived that his outlay had had something to do, even everything, with Alfred's rescue. And in a remote way Alfred, too, accepted this conclusion as perfectly just.

However, he continued to argue as violently as ever between gulps of sweet, tepid tea, while his uncle at times actually shook his fist under his nose and the whole table vibrated beneath the energy they were liberating. Their enraged voices interrupted each other with the most exaggerated insults and sneers. But this interchange which suggested a disgraceful imminence of blows was suddenly halted by the arrival of the waitress, who, looking curiously down at them in the uproar they were making, demanded if Alfred wanted anything more.

Alfred stared up at her vacantly. He was arrested all at once by something bold in her rather greenish eyes, and noticed with a slow regard the peculiar thickness of her hair.

As she tore off the check and put it down, he managed to touch her hand. She drew it away somewhat quickly and indignantly, yet left an impression of having controlled, also, a challenging laugh. Alfred watched her alertly as she moved off.

Presently her head turned, and she met his glance from a distance, full of the greatest disdain, which challenged, too.

His uncle, who had paused to relight his cigar, had lost nothing of this. His voice dropped with an astonishing alteration into a placidly conversational tone.

"I guess the trouble with you is, Alfred," he said philosophically, "you're spoiling."

Zacharias understood the idiom, but made no answer. He reflected silently. It was clear that the confused argument was at an end. He himself felt purged and serene, and the bad-tempered outburst which might have been expected to upset his digestion had had exactly the opposite effect, like a piquant sauce. He met his uncle's round, observant eye with comfortable understanding. Both tacitly accepted the fact that their explosive quarrel had not been a quarrel at all, but only a kind of emotional exercise which did not in the least impair their mutual regard.

"We'd better be going home, Alfred," said Uncle Harry at last; "your Aunt Rose will be getting to think something has happened to us."

They rose. Alfred looked around for the waitress again, but she was not in sight. He put down a small tip. Outside they walked a short distance to a trolley which presently began to travel at a great rate out of the town across flat, sandy scrub-land. But on one side could be seen a vast, unending colony of small frame bungalows, packed side by side in monotonous regularity. There was no perceptible division between the settlements whose names were shouted out unintelligibly at intervals of pausing by the conductor. Then the trolley would bang on its way again, emitting now and then a hoarse sound like a foghorn. At last Uncle Harry and Alfred got out, lugging the heavy bag between them.

The sun blazed down fiercely, but the salt tang of the sea mingled with the heat. They made their way toward a section of long, level streets into which was scattered much unattended refuse. As far as the eye could see, the miles of bungalows rolled away on either hand. On many of their porches huge families were sitting. A good many were engaged in fanning themselves. Children screamed and played in the gutters, and here and there on the sidewalks little groups of people in cheap, flashy sports clothing stood idly gossiping and talking. Now and then an elderly man in a skullcap and with a white flowing beard wandered past. At intervals an untidy-looking market or store could be seen, with large Koshier lettering on its windows. The air had an evocation of lively odours and complex suggestions, mingling with connotations of sensuality, gaudy colours, religious fervour, learning, vulgarity, and enormous energy. In this vast shabby playground swarmed the irrepressible, overwhelming, and astonishing people of the Jews. This summer city was one more monument to their indomitable persistence and fecundity, to their survival of ten thousand persecutions, through whose dreadful ban they had yet managed to come up like witch-grass between the cracks of stone.

Alfred looked on all sides of him with a kind of proud love. He felt happy to be here, made peaceful by the commingled dirt and glitter. Every one of the nearly similar bungalows seemed to be packed to overflowing by the poorer relatives and friends of the family that had rented it. He thought bitterly of the Gentile delusion about the universality of Jewish riches, a conviction that persisted insanely in the face of countless, wretched slums and ghettos.

From these weary feelings his attention fell dimly upon a house in the distance that was ostentatiously unlike all the rest. It stood apart on rising ground upon some land of its own. It was large and made of fawn-coloured limestone with a bright red, terra-cotta roof. There was something pretentious about it, and its solitary appearance of wealth

suggested the character of an owner who had built elaborately down here to achieve an easy distinction without much taste, and bask in the envy of a poor community.

Uncle Harry, noticing the direction of Alfred's gaze, said in a voice that frankly revealed a portion of that envy: "Some house, huh? Belongs to a Hebe who calls himself Jordan—Maximilian Jordan. He's in the specialty candy business—makes them nickel candy bars like 'Honeymoon Hearts' and 'Sugar Daddies.' That's a good business, too. But he don't have to get so stuck-up about it—I seen him on the beach a coupla times with his nose in the air, like he wouldn't talk to nobody under Rockefeller."

Abruptly Uncle Harry broke off to point animatedly at a seedy-looking bungalow halfway down the cluttered street.

"But, look, we're home already, Alfred! And there's your Aunt Rose waiting for us!"

Alfred was given a room on the shady side of the littered, cheaply-furnished house. It was restful there. Even the many sounds from the streets came to his ears in a mild, agreeable hum. He set out all his books and papers very neatly and methodically and then went dispiritedly to work. But he drove himself mercilessly as if finding a kind of satisfaction in self-inflicted pain.

Nothing interrupted him. Only an occasional child would now and then wander into the narrow alleyway between this and the next bungalow and peer at him on lifted toes through the screen with sharp, observant eyes. Uncle Harry's family, itself, gave him no trouble at all. His two small cousins, Milton and Bernard, were unusually wellbehaved. Aunt Rose left him alone also. She was a singularly plain, almost repellent-looking woman, with her blotchy skin and faintly reddish hair. Her voice was as harsh as a filing sound, and its accent was atrocious. But there was something rich and sardonic in the glint of her eyes, and a kind of eternal scoffing quality lent to her utterances a twisted fascination.

Uncle Harry, who, when he was not away at one of his theatres, was engaged in constantly picking up new acquaintances on the beach or the streets, was himself fascinated by her. She derided him and insulted him and questioned every statement he made as if in a calm certainty that it was bound to be a lie. Uncle Harry gazed at her delightedly on these occasions. Often he shook his head with admiration and called upon Alfred with significant grunts to witness the braininess of this unparalleled woman.

A quiet month went by. In the afternoon Zacharias usually wandered down alone to the nearest beach, had a brief, reluctant dip, and then lay sunning himself peacefully. Thousands of Jewish families, countless children, any amount of drowsily-entangled lovers, and groups of husky young men throwing balls to one another, covered the wide sand. Here and there a few swimmers could be seen out beyond the mild surf, causing those on shore to watch them and discuss them in an excited gabble that had a quality of intensity about nothing.

Afterwards Alfred would make his way home to one of Aunt Rose's excellent meals, and presently go to work once more. He had now become quite brown, and he was putting on weight. And for the time being he had sternly put to one side his passionate interest in sociological improvement, with an air of storing up his strength for a later day. Uncle Harry seemed gratified by these signs of alteration. But though he did not revert to his suggestion that Alfred join him in his business, it could be felt that he had not forgotten.

One day, when Uncle Harry happened to be home, he came in about five o'clock with the conceited look he always wore whenever something happened which he could twist into another proof of his surpassing cleverness.

"What do you think?" he burst out immediately to all of them upon entering. "I was just taking a little walk along Beach 27th Street when who should I see but that stuck-up Max Jordan. I act like I'm just as good as he is, as I start to go by, when all of sudden he stops and holds out his

hand with a big grin!" Uncle Harry paused with a big grin of his own. "And what do you think he done that for?"

"Maybe it was your good looks he liked," said Aunt Rose contemptuously in her raucous voice.

Uncle Harry beamed upon her admiringly for a moment. "Well, I'll tell you," he went on. "He says to me, 'Ain't you Harry Silverstein who went to Public School 97?' And I says, 'Yeah, sure.' And he says, 'Well, don't you remember the time when a feller that wrote a fresh note to one of the girls blamed it on you and almost got you expelled?'"

"Right away then I recognized him. 'Max Jacobs!' I says. 'You're Max Jacobs!' 'I used to be,' he says. So it turns out we was nothing but a coupla old friends. Then he tells me he's lost his wife ten years back, but has a daughter grown already, and a son he's got in Harvard College. And now he wants we should go up to see him tonight, so him and me can talk over old times."

Uncle Harry suddenly reflected. It was evident that the sentimental past had less attraction for him than the practical future. He muttered to himself with an air of speculation:

"I tell you I can smell some business there!"

"Funny business!" exclaimed Aunt Rose scornfully.

Uncle Harry chuckled, and speechlessly begged Alfred to notice. He was profoundly disappointed when Aunt Rose flatly refused to go.

"What should I want to know rich people like your no-good friends for?" she demanded. "Ain't I got troubles enough already?"

Reluctantly Uncle Harry gave in at last, but he insisted that at any rate Alfred must accompany him.

"Look, I want you should go and use all the big words you know, so Max will see what an education you got, too, and how I got a nephew who ain't no piker."

"Listen to who's talking!" Aunt Rose jeered. "Big words he's got to have now! It's the uncle they'll know is the piker!"

As much because of Uncle Harry's eagerness, as from his

own brainfag after a tedious day, in which he had not once set foot out of doors, Alfred agreed to join him; and a little after eight o'clock they set out for the Jordan home.

It was a close Summer evening. Nearly everyone in the festering, packed community had wandered wearily out to the streets, or lay about breathlessly on the stifling porches. The sandy earth itself seemed to sweat in the humid air.

Alfred and his uncle made their way toward the rising ground in the direction of the sea, where the Jordans' gaudy, limestone house stood. When they reached there, they noticed some big cars parked outside, one of them with a chauffeur drowsing at the wheel.

Uncle Harry's eyes, taking in everything with hawklike perception, widened when the door was opened to them by a Negro butler in a white jacket. At this sight he dug his knuckles excitedly against Alfred's kidneys. His face burned with the unmixed interest of a child's, and its excessive shrewdness now appeared mingled with the simplest naïveté. It was inconceivable that Uncle Harry would ever glut himself with enough wonders, or fail anywhere to have a good time.

He was unable to avoid feeling the texture of a portiere by pinching it between his fingers, as he walked down the dark hall with a fresh cigar locked between his teeth, and his whole manner bursting with brashness and gall.

Alfred, on the other hand, depressed by his long concentration upon things that irritated him like follies, was in an almost sullen mood. Unreasonably he hated this house with its self-satisfied ostentation, and felt hostile in advance, also, toward those who occupied it.

He shook hands ungraciously with Maximilian Jordan, who now came to greet Uncle Harry. Jordan was about fifty, short and obscure-looking, with a round head clipped so closely that the hair looked like bristles. His eyes had a cunning, wheedling expression. But behind his anxiously propitiating manner, it was plain he was almost as conceited as Uncle Harry himself.

He brought them into the principal room. It was dim in here, too, in spite of a number of lamps in shades of tinted crystal squatting on small tables. Gleams of woodwork could be seen as if reflected by fire, and bits of gaudy pictures sprang into light, with the remaining portions receding into darkness. A great many objects of ornamental and futile bric-a-brac crowded the tables and the mantel. On the floor was a thick hot-looking Chinese rug, and arranged in stiff formation were various chairs upholstered in expensive ugly brocade.

Seated here were two middle-aged Jewish couples and members of their parties, evidently the visitors who had arrived in the big, shining cars outside. The men appeared to have either stumpy, undistinguished bodies, or oddly shaped heads; and were dressed in voluminous knickerbockers and exaggerated sports jackets in colours or checks. The women with them, on the other hand, were attired almost formally, showing bare throats and bare, swollen arms from which bracelets often dangled. They exuded the strong sweetness of assorted perfumes, and exhibited glistening coiffures of the very latest design, as if they had just that moment stepped out of the most fashionable beauty parlours.

It was stridently clear that everyone here was quite wealthy, and had amassed his fortune in his own lifetime, so that the agreeable shock and novelty of this had not yet worn off. They were sleekly conscious of being rich, even while they trailed the evidence of squalid origins in distorted bodies and the inability to wear either their fine clothes or jewels with any casualness.

Their talk suggested exactly the same contradiction: it was guttural and full of solecisms and mispronunciations, but it concerned itself solely with scattered mentionings of foreign watering-places, huge hotels, celebrated restaurants, and the names of the most exclusive shops. They seemed to be bandying about, with the utmost satisfaction, their familiarity with luxuries, sophisticated pleasures, and all the good things of the world.

Zacharias felt towards these people a simple dislike. He looked upon them as though they, who knew just as well as he what it was to be desperately poor, had obscurely betrayed him. His lip curled and he sat in sulkily silence after angrily taking the cocktail the coloured butler served him and downing it at a gulp.

Uncle Harry, meanwhile, had at once plunged into argumentative talk with one of the groups down the room, and was now putting them in their places by the tested method of simply shouting them down. Alfred could hear his voice screaming out above them all. But presently he hove into view again, with one arm around Maximilian Jordan's waist, as if he were about to whirl into a dance with him.

"Come on, Alfred!" he exclaimed exuberantly. "Max here is going to show us over his house."

With an appearance of disdain, but to avoid the possibility of being drawn into talk that was sure to be still more offensive to him, Alfred got up and moodily trailed after them.

In his soft voice, which struck a continuous grovelling yet trustless note, Maximilian Jordan began to tell Uncle Harry the values of the different possessions they passed on their way upstairs.

"How do you like that banister, Harry? Look how far it goes—right up to the top! And all one piece, and solid mahogany!"

"Solid mahogany!" Uncle Harry cried with a snort of disbelief, running his finger over the waxed surface. "Veneer is what!—don't tell me!—I got a cousin in the furniture business."

"For two cents I'd give you a knife and let you cut a hole in it to see for yourself," Jordan protested. "But, wait, what do you think of the armour suit on the landing there, like the rich people used to wear in the old days? A genuine piece—I wouldn't take five hundred dollars for it! But I got it for eighty—eighty dollars, I'm telling you—from a

friend of mine who was going bankrupt and then killed himself."

"A fine friend you are, Max Jacobs!" said Uncle Harry with more appreciation than rebuke in his tone. He rolled his cigar between his wet lips, and tapped the armour with a dirty fingernail. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, that's what."

"Well," said Jordan philosophically, "when they're weak, you gotta choke 'em."

The conversation continued in this strain with Uncle Harry growing more and more impressed so that he could have gnashed his teeth with envy, and at the same time growing more and more determined not to reveal any part of this. He disparaged everything with loud outcries of contempt or disbelief, which seemed to strike Jordan like a tribute. Silently Alfred brought up the rear with a gloomy lofty air, yet listening very carefully to everything.

Presently Jordan opened one of the doors in the crowded upper hallway, and then entered a kind of sitting room, laden with the same sort of curios and art objects that filled the room downstairs.

Beneath a single lamp, a young woman, with long, silk-stockinged legs thrust out in front of her, and crossed at the ankles like a man's, was sitting reading a newspaper which screened her entire face. As they came in, she put this down and looked up quickly at them.

"Oh," said Mr. Jordan, "this is my daughter, Myra—Mr. Silverstein and Mr. Zacharias."

The young woman faintly nodded in acknowledgment, only saying to her father in a low voice: "Did Louis come?" and afterwards shrugging her shoulders when he shook his head. Mr. Jordan then proceeded to tug Uncle Harry along with him to some interconnecting rooms to display still other valuables. Alfred, however, remained standing where he was.

His tongue had shrunk back in his mouth, as if he had been unexpectedly frightened. He was even more surprised.

Just as in the midst of some cultivated, well-bred family group, there occasionally appears, like a mutation in genetics, one coarse or loutish member, whose features, manners, and even whose illiterate speech throw the gravest doubt upon the infallibility of environment and the importance of upbringing, so Miss Jordan seemed without the remotest relationship to her undersized, vulgar father.

There was, indeed, something extraordinarily aristocratic about her. She was young, twenty-two or twenty-three at the outside, but she was perfectly assured and mature-looking. Her hair was ink-black and shone, her silky skin was fawn-coloured, and her jutting, character-full nose was composed of infinite delicate planes whose perfection was like an ache, while her intense, dark eyes gleamed with an immediately felt intelligence likely to make its possessor find the world a lonely place.

She was dressed, furthermore, in exquisite taste. Her body revealed its uncorrupted masses as if no dress could ever manage to conceal them. She had supplemented her striking looks with unnecessary make-up, but this added a kind of excitement to them in the statement that she was parading herself. Indeed, she seemed to be waiting idly there, like an actress behind the scenes of a play, bored and withdrawn until the moment of a dazzling, artificial entrance.

Alfred felt an astonishing weakness steal over him. He was no more capable of tearing himself away than if he had been under a spell. As he remained looking at her, stupefied, her own gaze calmly and swiftly disposed of him. She accepted the effect she had made upon him, as if she were not surprised by it, was vaguely annoyed by it, but would have been even more annoyed by its absence.

"Did you just come in from New York?" she asked pleasantly. "This is such a frightful dump down here, isn't it? But father won't live anywhere else."

Worn fine by his plodding day, obscurely resentful of a display of parasitic riches this evening, and above all, humiliated at being upset by a beauty which had given her

such power without effort, Zacharias burst out fiercely in a trembling tone:

"I suppose you're too good for a place like this! That's what you mean, isn't it? That's usually what capitalists mean. But I'd like to hear just once a reason why any of you think you're entitled to special privileges!"

She opened her mouth at this nonsensical, almost hysterical attack, and in her surprise emitted a faint laugh. But it was clear he had interested her, if only by puzzling her.

"I haven't the slightest idea of what you're talking about," she said slowly. "Just why are you angry at me?"

"I'm a Communist," said Zacharias, jutting his chin out. "If that means anything to you."

"Not much," she said. "Tell me about it."

Though he no longer quivered with the confused rage that had filled his opening words, and was even beginning to feel uncomfortably that he had made something of a fool of himself, Zacharias was unable to step down from that attitude immediately. He was actually animated only by a painful longing to impress and please her, but the familiar approaches in this department, which he had always found so easy, were now blocked by his perception that he was talking to someone with brains.

He harangued her, therefore, as idiotically as if he were exploding violences from a soap-box. She listened patiently, only putting in a comment or a question every so often that was so apposite as to make him feel more and more uncertain of himself. Soon he was aware of an indignant feeling, noticing that in spite of his swaggering manner, the tone he was taking was defensive, almost apologetic. Yes, he was actually apologizing for his radical views! His awe increased. He was aware that his brow was quite damp, in a way that was not related to the sultry night. While nothing she said was in itself very remarkable, she had that peculiar quality of the highly intelligent of seeming to invest commonplaces with something of their own intelligence.

"I see," she said thoughtfully at last, "you would like to

ruin father, and everybody like him, and give all the profits of his chocolate factory to the people who work in it. That would be very nice for them, wouldn't it? And what would you like to do with me?"

Zacharias quavered before something ironic and belittling in her beautiful eyes. She did not take him seriously, he saw mournfully, and in this moment he could not see that there was any reason why she should. In the deep feeling of helplessness that came over him, there was a kind of despair. But she saved him from trying to answer by suddenly stretching her body as if it had grown cramped, and saying in another tone:

"How hot it is—too hot just to sit here. I'd like to go out to the beach for some air—you can come along if you like, and tell me some more. It's very interesting really. And what did you say you did?"

With a beaten feeling, which he could not shake off, Zacharias obeyed her, wondering dismally if he would not have obeyed her, also, had she suggested that he jump out of the window. She proposed that they go down the back way to avoid the guests below, and in another moment they were out on the warm, sticky sand, picking their way across the dunes towards the shore.

No stars were out; it would probably rain tomorrow. The sea rose and fell with a tired sound. In the darkness on the beach other couples here and there, and whole family groups, could vaguely be made out, trying for what coolness there was.

Miss Jordan, talking of a good many unrelated things but chiefly of her own sensations, pushed on without showing any sign of wishing to sit down and rest.

Alfred was not talkative himself. He felt too miserable to speak. He had never met anyone in his life before who had impressed him so much, and he did not like it. His vanity had been dealt a serious blow. Meanwhile, he kept smelling her hair in the darkness, and reflecting with senseless, tormented concentration upon her gait, as rhythmic as a

dancer's. He wished that they were all alone in the world—that this beach was the world. Then he could have shown her he was the stronger, by beating her if necessary; he could have shown what he thought of her intelligence! It would be a wonderful thing to be brutal to her, to destroy that imperturbability, and hear her cry out.

Looking about him, he now saw that they had come so far that to all appearances they were actually alone in the world. There were no longer any voices drifting up from people lying on the sand, only the sound of the low wash of the water. Nothing could be seen except the glow of the lights in Far Rockaway.

"How I'd love to swim now!" said Miss Jordan suddenly. She took a few steps to the rim of the surf, stooped, and paddled her fingers in it. "Oh, let's go in! It would be such fun—and there's no one around——"

Alfred's heart gave a great jump. Did she mean, did she actually mean for them to strip and go in together in the darkness? What else could she mean? His head swam wildly. All at once he wondered if he had made a fool's mistake about her. But no, that was not possible. Something told him to keep his distance, she meant exactly what she said, exactly that and no more.

While he was thus trying to adjust his emotions to his prejudices, Myra Jordan's searching eyes had detected a small dune a little way up the beach.

"Come on," she said. "There's a good place. You take the right side, and I'll go on the left."

Presently with agitated fingers, as scared as a boy in his first experience, Zacharias found himself removing his clothes in the dark. He had not even finished before he heard her clear, cheerful voice:

"Are you almost ready? I am. Hurry up and come along!"

Through the heavy night he could just make out the slim shape of her figure passing in front of him. He stepped after her, wanting to linger at that distance, and straining his eyes to feast greedily, but he was ashamed to have her

know. In another moment he was walking beside her, carefully pretending not to look at her, but throbbingly conscious of nothing but her nakedness. Then the outermost of the small cool waves rippled over their feet. She gave a cry of mingled pain and delight.

"Oh, isn't this fun!"

The next instant she ran forward, splashing and shrieking, and plunged in. Zacharias dubiously followed her. Soon they were laughing together with bubbling, choking sounds, and swimming side by side, turning over in the delicious water to float, and then rolling back to swim again. She began to tread water, holding out her hands to him in a meaningless game, shook the water out of her eyes, and tried to drag him under. In this manoeuvre his body slid softly along hers, but she instantly pulled herself free and took a stroke away from him, yet leaving him at the same time with a pounding heart wondering whether she had not let this happen deliberately.

But all at once she grew tired. She headed for the shore again, ruffled her hair, and began to run up and down along the sand like a boy to dry herself. Zacharias stood watching her boldly, for he knew she was willing now to have him do that, just as he knew this permission meant nothing to her. He would do something to arrest her, he thought fiercely, he would show her he was not to be so despised!

He listened grimly to her chattering voice as they hurried up behind the dune and began to dress again. Why hadn't he tried to kiss her when they were out in the water together, or down on the beach? And the answer was absurdly that somehow she had given him no encouragement.

He came out from behind the right side of the dune to find her trying to pull her stockings on over sandy legs. She gave up with a laugh, and crumpled them into a ball in her hand.

"I feel wonderful!" she exclaimed, and her voice went up through the night like a sound of rapture.

Dressed and now hidden, she seemed more intoxicating to

him than ever. He longed to utter a thousand things to her, and had never felt more stupid.

As they walked back, however, Miss Jordan, in glowing spirits, talked freely. It was good talk, not clever, and not designed to show off her gifts, or her experiences, or her subtleties. It was as natural as a letter, and flowed from her with a grave ease, as if she were talking to herself. She mentioned her tastes, her interests, and her aversions in a way that expressed her whole viewpoint. Zacharias listened with an enormous frown. He was actually attentive, but too dazed to know at the moment what it was she said. He was storing it up, packing it away, to devour and digest it later.

Soon they saw the house standing on its slight elevation. They went around to the front door this time.

A young man, a stranger, was now waiting on the veranda, irritably smoking a cigarette. He had a petulant, spoiled face. As Zacharias came up under the light set in the ceiling, the young man looked at him quickly and contemptuously, with eyes that appraised his cheaply cut, ready-made clothes as accurately as a woman's. He then took the cigarette out of his mouth, flung it away like a stone, and said crossly:

"Where have you been?"

"Oh, hello, Louis!" said Miss Jordan in surprise. "I gave you up hours ago! This is Mr. Zacharias—that is your name, isn't it?—Louis Hartzheim, Jr."

Alfred gave the faintest start as though struck by a light, invisible whip. Louis Hartzheim and Company were enormous investment bankers, multimillionaires. This must be the son of that formidable clan.

The young man was no longer paying the slightest attention to him. He said rapidly:

"Want to hear some good jazz, Myra? I've found a new place—swell! Tell the old man, hop in the car, and we'll go."

She made up her mind quickly and nodded. "Let me fix up first—my hair is a sight—I won't be ten minutes. Good-by, Mr. Zacharias, so nice to have met you."

She was gone; she had pulled the door open and was gone, flying happily up the stairs with a flash of skirts. Young Hartzheim turned rudely and stepped into the hall.

For a moment Alfred remained where he was, while a wave of formless dejection rode over him. He had thought he had interested her, he had been sure of it, but now he knew this was not so. If her reason for agreeing to go out with young Hartzheim had been because of his riches, because he was so great a catch, it would not have mattered; but she was obviously going out with him simply because she expected to have a good time, and would have a good time. It was this limitless capacity for enjoyment of a limitless variety that told him how little he had scored. The evening which had been so memorable for him was only an incident for her among ceaseless amusing incidents, and it was perfectly possible she would have forgotten all about him by tomorrow.

He went slowly inside and made his way into the other room. Some of the guests had disappeared. Uncle Harry, who was still going at top speed with his old schoolmate, looked up and saw him, and broadly winked.

"Time we was on our way, Max," he exclaimed. "Now don't forget that little proposition of mine. Call me up any day next week and we'll have lunch over it. And don't be writing any more fresh notes to the girls, meanwhile, and saying I done it!" He got up and slapped Alfred on the back. "Well, Professor, I guess it looks like you was ready to hit the hay."

Outside, and out of hearing of the house, Uncle Harry doubled up.

"Alfred, I never thought you had it in you! You kill me, that's what! Cutting out Louis Hartzheim's son, and getting away with it! You shoulda seen Max's face, when he found out you was gone with her. Positively, you kill me!"

Zacharias' bitter expression could not be made out in the darkness. He said with an effort:

"I don't think I want to go to bed just yet. I'd like to take a little walk—by myself."

Uncle Harry recovered himself and looked at him curiously, but he only said good-naturedly:

"O. K., Alfred. I'll leave the key out for you."

As soon as he was alone, Zacharias turned and headed for the trolley tracks that ran between the beaches and the settlements. He walked like someone who had a purpose, and knew exactly what he was doing. By good luck a trolley car came along just as he reached one of the stops. He jumped on board. Very soon he was in Far Rockaway.

He got out and went directly to a murky lunchroom opposite the railroad station. He sat down and glanced about anxiously. In a moment he saw the greenish-eyed, thick-haired waitress with short curved legs for whom he was looking. He beckoned to her. She came sidling up to the table.

"All I want is a cup of coffee," he said, fixing her with his eye. He lowered his voice. "What time do you get out of here?"

She was a little startled by the abruptness of this indication of personal interest. But something in his headlong determination seemed to hold her.

"Oh, just a little while from now," she said in a lazy, insinuating tone. "In fact, if you'd come in ten minutes later, I'da been gone."

"Want to go out somewhere?"

She affected to consider, studying him swiftly. At last she smiled. "Maybe."

"I'll wait here for you."

In about a quarter of an hour she came through the service doors dressed in her street clothes. Alfred rose, followed her out, and then fell into step beside her.

"Where are we going?" she demanded.

"Let's take a little walk along the beach first and get acquainted."

For a moment she looked as if she were about to demur,

but some effect of intensity in his haggard, overwrought face appeared to overcome her hesitations.

They walked through the town, and reaching the shore, began to make their way along the sand in the direction from which Alfred had just come. He was silent, and supposing him shy, she talked for both, uttering a series of pointless, jumbled complaints about the place where she was working, together with mentionings of the number of men who admired her. Her body had an unwashed smell, and her voice was vulgar and combative.

After they had gone on a long distance, she exclaimed: "Say, where are you taking me, anyway? Let's sit down a while, can't we? My feet are all worn out!"

"Just a little farther. There's a much better place than this."

At last he saw it, the shape of the small dune making a patch of blacker density in the surrounding dark.

"Here we are! No, come around this side—on the left."

She began to grow a little belligerent, and perhaps frightened by something odd about his behaviour.

"What for?" she demanded.

He answered her by embracing her. She gave a quick, reassured laugh. She pretended to push him away, but her hand reached up and touched his cheek.

"You're funny all right! Still, just as soon as I saw you that time you came in, I liked you right away. I often wondered why you never came back."

"Well, you're not wondering now, are you?" said Alfred hoarsely, with no idea of what he was saying.

He lifted her and then lowered her to the sand, dropping down beside her. She was silent and made no resistance. He could not see her face now, but he shut his eyes as though some glimpse of it might interfere with his imaginings. He set his mouth firmly on hers with an anguished sound.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE SUN BLAZED overhead as violently as ever, and the deadening heat mocked the aspirations and energies of men with its listless statement of futility. But on this early day of September, the passing of Summer could somehow also be felt, and the resignation in the still air was like the resignation of decay.

All last week people had been leaving the resort. Many of the bungalows had been boarded up already, and the streets began to have a forlorn, deserted look. Yes, the Summer was at an end, and everything was over.

In the untidy porch Alfred put down for a second his big bag that had been packed for going away. His face looked pale and ill; he had not gone to bed all last night. He had sat up, destroying some papers and mementos of not much importance, and occupying himself with the composition of a single letter to Myra Jordan.

He had rewritten it many times. At first it had wildly covered three pages with an effect of raving. Gradually it had become quieter in tone and tighter. But when at last it had been compressed into five lines that seemed curt in their simplicity and which contained only the calm declaration that he was going to kill himself, he tore this up, too. What accusation or explanation could equal the act itself! Words would only belittle it, not amplify it. His silence would speak for him far better.

Now he kissed Aunt Rose good-bye quickly, and patted his two small cousins gently on the shoulder; then he and Uncle Harry, lugging the heavy, book-filled bag between them, started for the trolley stop.

As the clattering, swaying trolley banged upon its course to Far Rockaway, Uncle Harry was for once quite still, only chewing nervously on the cigar butt which he had allowed to go out some time previously. Then when they had reached the station, he said in a pleading accent:

"How about a little sandwich before you go, Alfred?"

Maybe, even, you got time for a nice little steak, cooked medium rare? And about so much French-fried potatoes, and a good glass of tea. How about it, hey?"

Zacharias only shook his head. He wished that he could smile, but he could not even do that; he could not pretend. Still it did not matter; Uncle Harry understood.

They waited in silence on the platform together. Uncle Harry lowered his head thinking. It was as if he revolved many considerations that were the conclusions of instinct and experience. He seemed to know that it was useless, it was even cruel, to utter any of them. He lifted his head at last, and his crude-featured face, with its coarse and grasping expression, also managed to convey a noble compassion. His ignorant eyes had become patient and wise.

Presently the train came in. Alfred got in. He lifted his bag into the overhead rack. He glanced out of the dirty window, and saw Uncle Harry outside making a great business of relighting his cigar stub. Uncle Harry smiled meekly at him; his lips formed words, but Alfred could not make them out. Then the signal rope twitched, the doors slid shut, and in a moment Uncle Harry was lost to view like a slide drawn past a projector.

Alfred gazed out at the landscape sweeping by. Untenanted shacks, reared upon poles like stilts, lifted themselves up from muddy marshes. Factories smudged the horizon, and dredges still worked torpidly in the bay, just as they had been working when he had first passed through here.

While he was thus blankly gazing, he was all at once surprised, as though it were happening actually to someone else, to discover that he was beginning to weep. Without the movement of a muscle, the extravagant tears gathered in his eyes, and slowly trickled down his wasted-looking face. There was a mongrel quality about that unforeseen expression of grief. It was full of self-pity, yet there was something tragic about it, too, like the shattered weeping of an invalid.

Abruptly he abandoned himself to his sufferings and

began to relive them again, lingering as much upon his pain as upon those instants in which there had been only a pure joy. Softly and cruelly his memories began to play with his heart like a cat with a mouse.

Yet this passion, which he now examined with detachment but with anguish, had never once forgotten that it was physical, that it stemmed solely from that and aspired solely to that. Only, in its overwhelming reaches it had somehow elevated physical appetite without in the least altering it, to another, grander plane.

When, in his first acquaintanceship with her, he had thus become more and more aware of Miss Jordan's intelligence, his hunger to possess her had merely increased, as though her brains formed some sexual part of her, as tangible as her breasts, and might be kissed like her lips.

Very early he had become convinced that she, a young woman, knew all about everyone, even herself, and nearly all about everything, with a clarity that burned her free from prejudice. Indeed, her brain made her a little cold, precluding the warm hope that she could ever, under any circumstances, lose her head. Still everything about her was in beautiful harmony, like the fascinating balances of an intricate machine: her ruled passion, her sure health, her tender and disillusioned humour, her estimate of her own wisdom, and her knowledge of its unimportance.

Zacharias had become hers with every breath that was in him. He had ceased all at once to have any identity except in his relationship with her. He moved about without appearing to think, without knowing what it was he did, or what he said to anyone. He lifted his fork at Aunt Rose's table as mechanically as though his arm were controlled by a spring; he spoke, smiled, gravely opened his books, and undressed himself at night, as if he had not the slightest inkling of the meaning of these actions.

Miss Jordan could not help but be aware of the strange degree of intensity she had this time evoked. Sitting with him on the beach now and then, or at his side at an

occasional movie, it was impossible not to be cognizant of the vibrations in his silence. That lost and tragic stillness, in which the air trembled with his burning devotion, impressed someone who would not have been impressed by the most talented glibness.

She often looked curiously at him. It was no novelty to her to have young men in love with her. Even down here this summer there were several others, two of whom at least were infatuated enough to soothe away the uncertainty of most women. But they were in love with her simply because they were young and she was beautiful; it was merely the chance of their meeting her that had made them fall in love with her instead of someone else: it did not mean anything, if one did not confuse oneself with Nature.

But in the case of Zacharias, she felt the impossible thing had actually happened: that she could not have been supplanted. If he had met someone else, he might have fallen in love but not to this extent. All language was worthless to express what he felt about her, that was what his silence said. He conveyed the singleness of his dedication to an idea, like a drone in a hive, willing to be selected for death if that were love, too. Yes, the statement that he was willing to die to have her was at last no figure of speech.

This insane valuation almost equalled a woman's sustaining illusion about the importance of the gift of herself. And this offer, which was a man himself, and Louis Hartzheim's offer, which was the world, set Miss Jordan drumming her white teeth with her pink nails. All that Summer there was no question of anyone else; these two led the race; the moody, shabby, homely young man with his unceasing fever; and the spoiled and petulant heir to many millions.

She was away quite often, at house parties and week-ends, but whenever she came back, Alfred was waiting there with something comforting about his unchanged aspect. It was as though he had been suspended in a kind of coma during her absence, and would have waited patiently so all his life,

unable to experience any sensation, and indifferent to existence until she returned.

Then one day she took it into her head to break an engagement and drop in without warning at Uncle Harry's.

She lightened the atmosphere of the dreary little bungalow as she stepped across its threshold. Aunt Rose was immediately enraptured with her; for once her sour tongue was still, and she wandered about with a foolish, surprised look on her face.

Miss Jordan's beautiful clothes set her apart. It was not alone that they were costly and admirable in taste. Clothes, which are the general common denominator of self-expression and the unconscious confession of an individual's private opinion of himself, are naturally in the case of the majority of a dim and nondescript order.

Miss Jordan's clothes were an honest statement of her claim to superiority. Her own taste was so sure that she was not in the least repelled by homeliness or even ugliness. She adjusted herself with ease to the conditions of Uncle Harry's household and was not critical of the uninviting interior of the bungalow, furnished like all such places in a cheap, gimcrack fashion. She soon won the two small boys by becoming a small boy herself. About her interest in them there was nothing of the affectation of maternalism assumed by most young, unmarried women in the expectation of making a devastating impression.

She was prevailed upon to stay for the evening meal, and had a fine time helping with the cooking. She worked hard and never once suggested that she thought she was doing something amusing.

Alfred, meanwhile, sat in the other room, thinking about her. It was Uncle Harry who kept following her about, and trying to entertain her for the delight of hearing her laugh.

"I'm telling you honestly," he said, looking into her tenderly derisive eyes, "if it wasn't that I got a wife already, I wouldn't waste no time, Myra, making up to you! Absolutely none!"

Aunt Rose cast him a look of weary scorn.

"And for what?" she jeered. "Is it you got in your head that even in a hundred years could be born two women who was such fools?"

Uncle Harry's chuckle of appreciation made it clear he did not think so, or two paragons either.

After supper, a young Jewess next door, a stenographer on vacation who had recently displayed the signs of a warm interest in Zacharias, happened in for a visit. She was a rather pretty, voluptuous girl; and Alfred may have entertained some wild, confused imaginings of the effect of her infatuation on Myra Jordan. If so, he did not entertain them long.

Miss Lippmann sat on the floor at his feet, pulling her skirt down over her fat legs from time to time which inexplicably in another moment became indecently exposed again, while from her, with a shrill sound, there poured out flatteries so incredible and so banal as to suggest only the admirable boldness of her contempt for the intelligence of man. And her coarse voice was rendered even more grotesque by the affectation of infantilism.

Miss Jordan simply sat staring at her with a look of incredulity so enormous that nothing else was necessary to express her feelings. Her fine eyes seemed to be saying: "This isn't really happening!" and in the outraged contempt that filled her, poor Zacharias seemed unjustly to be included. She gave him a quietly ironic look when she bade him goodnight.

Still, that disagreeable impression did not last long, and Miss Jordan seemed, as often as not, to enjoy Alfred's company. He always listened with understanding to what she was talking about, even while over his brooding face there passed an occasional faint quiver. For his part he no longer made any mention of his radicalism, for he had soon discovered that she was bored by it; it simply did not interest her one way or another. Yet it was not difficult to avoid the topic which had formerly occupied his mind to the

exclusion of everything else, for now he seldom thought of it himself. It was there waiting, in case he cared to come back to it sometime or other.

The summer had gone swiftly; Alfred never needed to put into words what he wanted, scarcely from the first moment; but Miss Jordan had given him only one hope: she kept on seeing him.

Once or twice he had wondered uneasily, as he lay awake, staring into the darkness from the cot in his bedroom, about the utter indifference with which Mr. Jordan himself witnessed his passion. For Uncle Harry's intense longing to get a rise out of his old schoolfellow was not gratified; Mr. Jordan remained perfectly peaceful, even a little contemptuous, as if at a clear waste of time. His attitude seemed to express an unshakable conviction that his daughter was not in any danger of making a fool of herself, or forgetting for a moment where real values lay.

But Zacharias knew better than the smug and greedy little man who had unaccountably begotten his amazing daughter; and knew in spite of everything he had a chance. Then on the beach, only two days ago, it had come and gone, in a few mild words and during a few indolent moments, before his desperate eyes.

He had borrowed a racquet and gone to play tennis with her that afternoon. Though he liked to watch games, and was, as Gamble had said, an ardent baseball fan, he played them all very badly, so that Miss Jordan wavered between exasperation and laughter at his ineptness. At last they had both changed into bathing-suits and gone for a swim.

Lulled by the exercise, Miss Jordan had dropped to the sand afterwards with a drowsy, beatific expression. But she was not really drowsy. She was looking thoughtfully and quite steadily at Zacharias beneath her lowered lids. There was a quiet and considering air about her.

"Every year I think how quickly the Summer's gone," she murmured idly. "Just the Summer, that is—not the Winter. I had a sort of shock when Father said something

this morning about going back to town next week."

She turned and looked out to sea, gazing very hard there, as if she reflected not only about that summer but of her summers ahead, as if she were looking dispassionately into the future itself. Then her gaze swept back and searchingly enveloped Zacharias once more.

Every nerve in him was tense. He knew almost what she was thinking, and in the misery of his own inadequacy, in his humbleness about this, which was itself the worst inadequacy, he could have cried out. But her beautiful eyes were very gentle, there was no need to be afraid. She liked him, he knew that now. She even liked him enormously, and was always at ease with him. She seemed to be waiting for him to say something, some last revelation that might alter the delicate balance of the two scales she hesitatingly held.

And suddenly he thought that though the Summer was gone, the Summer that would be locked shut like a box, he could let that happen without fear. After all, they were both going back to New York. In New York this Winter, away from those games and sports in which he did not shine, he would make himself too important to her to be relinquished. There would be restaurants and concerts and things like that. He would give up everything for her. Yes, even his active participation in Communism, since she did not like it.

And he began haltingly and terribly frightened, as though it were a proposal he now uttered, to try to suggest something of this. But as he went on talking, a kind of panic came over him, for it seemed to him that her face had fallen. Perhaps he had not gone far enough, he had not convinced her. He increased his offer of throwing away his cause for her like a drunkard offering to throw away his glass. She had become very still, and there was a sad, undecipherable look on her face. After a while she shook her head, as though she had made up her mind even while he had incoherently been speaking.

"No, Alfred, I'm afraid we shan't do any of those things.

It's been a nice Summer, and we'd better just leave it at that. You see, Louis Hartzheim has asked me to marry him, and I guess I will."

Zacharias scooped up some sand and let it run through his fingers. He was amazed how unmoved he felt. His expression looked only rather stupid. When she said it was time she was going back, he made no objection, but said good-bye quite calmly.

But the next day the terror struck him as delayed pain strikes after the first numbing effect of a death blow. At dawn he awoke with a low moaning sound, without knowing for a moment what he was moaning about. He ate some breakfast with a face that seemed to have grown haggard while he slept. Aunt Rose was very soft with him. Uncle Harry looked scared.

As early as he dared, Alfred started out for the Jordan home. The Negro butler told him that Miss Jordan was out. But Alfred was well aware that she hardly ever got up before ten.

He went down the steps and around to the side of the house, and then stood looking up blankly at her bedroom window. While he stared, the shade was abruptly drawn. It was, perhaps, pure coincidence, he had not even been seen, but as the shade came down it seemed to strike him like the blade of a guillotine.

For a moment he thought wildly of forcing his way inside and confronting her with his anguish, of making some kind of dreadful entreaty or other. But in a dismal flash he saw the scene that would inevitably result, her eyes growing cold before his repulsive abjection, and then colder still, like the eyes that had examined the pretensions of Miss Lippmann. She had made up her mind, there was nothing to be done, and he was alone, alone.

As he waited there, as if not knowing what to do next, a choked and bleating sound burst from him, which wretchedly failed to approximate the snake-like spitting it endeavoured to convey.

"Some day," he cried, "you will be an old woman!"

There was no answer nor any sound. After a while he went away.

He did not know how the day passed. It was wiped afterward from his memory like a day under anaesthetic. Toward midnight he all at once discovered himself, with the bewilderment of a sleep-walker aroused to a startled comprehension of his actions, tearing up papers, destroying scholastic jottings and a few personal letters, in the stillness of Uncle Harry's dreary bungalow. What was he about? Where was he so irretrievably departing? With a shock he saw he had arrived, without any thought about it at all, at the calm intention of killing himself.

He imagined himself back in New York tomorrow buying a quantity of powerful sedative tablets and going to some hotel somewhere. Instantly a shudder of revulsion passed through him. He plunged his head into his hands and tried to arrange his disrupted faculties.

Had he gone insane? Insane or not, it did not matter, the fact remained. It was not that life without Myra Jordan was unendurable, or that even in this hour he had any illusions about the permanence of ecstasy with her. But though there should be only a moment, the denial of that moment made all other fancies sick and empty. It was strange that while sexual completion revealed that sexual love was so unimportant, sexual frustration should make it the most important thing in life.

And suddenly, thinking of her firm flesh in the agonizing seductiveness of silk, thinking of her as Louis Hartzheim must intimately come to strip and examine her, he stifled a dreadful cry, not of jealousy alone, but of his insufferable deprivation. . . .

As he now sat in the train, listening to the clicking wheels, he perceived that the journey had flashed by during his reflections, and they were already entering the tunnel. His plain face with its hollows and mournful yet undignified

look, gazed vacantly back at him from a window which had been transmuted to a kind of dim mirror. His tears had ceased some time ago, he was conscious only that his head was aching severely.

The train slowed to a halt in the Pennsylvania Station, while the motors thumped on angrily. Zacharias got out, and sagging to one side beneath the tug of his bag, made his way through the labyrinth of passages to the subway. It was the rush hour, and the platforms were congested. In the subterranean gloom people moved hastily, with the flickering glances of animals, accompanied at intervals by the rumbling sounds of arriving and departing trains. Only its commonplace familiarity kept the scene from seeming like a representation of some Dantean hell.

Alfred found himself shoved by the mob behind him into the vestibule of an incoming train. An incredible number of persons were already packed in there, with legs, arms, and even heads, held rigidly as in a cast by one another's bodies. His bag fell against the shins of an emaciated-looking Negress, and was straddled by an Italian labourer. Two or three not very clean Jews, some drearily-neat Wall Street clerks, and several girls with faces the colour of dirty cake that had been splotted here and there with pink icing, swayed together in a compressed heap as the train shrieked on, and breathed in the foul air that was suggestive of a sunken submarine.

And as Zacharias appositely thought this, a man directly in front of him moved his constricted head stiffly, and disclosed still another man behind him. It was Adam Mallory.

Adam recognized Zacharias also at the same instant, and uttered an exclamation that was lost in the noise of the train. It was impossible to attempt a conversation of any kind but Adam waved at him and shouted.

The others gazed at them vacantly with an air of examining the extent of their familiarity or the secret of their occupations. Adam, though in dark clothes, was not wearing anything of a specially clerical nature. He had an

excited look, yet to Zacharias' bitter and prejudiced eyes he suggested only an objectionable complacency.

The train jolted into the next station. Adam, getting out, fought his way past, saying hurriedly, "Zack! How are you? I'm in Brooklyn tonight. Be sure to ring me up! Want to see you! Lots to tell you!" Then the doors slammed shut, and the train barged on again.

But in his engrossed distress Zacharias immediately forgot all about him. Instead, with a little shudder he all at once seemed to recover his own senses. With horror he drew back from the lugubrious resolution he had been contemplating. What had happened was simple. The mere glimpse of Adam, so comfortable and protected, had pointed out the surely enslaved lives of these others crowded together with him on the murky platform. These poor people here, piled in less tenderly than brutes being shipped to a stockyard, were no less than himself thwarted in their longings. He could not desert them. And he saw he could find solace and meaning in the cause which his unhappy love affair had only interrupted.

He felt weak at his own escape. He shivered at the narrowness of the margin by which it had been averted, never suspecting that deep down he had not seriously entertained it for a moment. He breathed more peacefully. And now the thought of Myra Jordan ceased to trouble him.

CHAPTER TWENTY

ADAM HAD BEEN delighted to see Zacharias as they both stood locked together on the metal platform, as though once more trapped in the *K-13*. He had looked at his old associate's bitter face with the relish that is always felt for a consistent character. What a coincidence to run into him immediately like this on his first visit to New York in more than a year! So much had happened, and so rapidly, since the War had left its stamp upon their lives. He hoped

Alfred would be sure to get in touch with him tonight. He would like to hear what had happened to him.

And leaving the subway and beginning to walk briskly across town, he smiled to think how he would have liked to have shouted out his own important news, that he was at this moment actually on his way to a hospital to have the first glimpse of his newborn baby.

As he strode along, a strong young man, so clearly not yet knocked down by the experiences of life, he reflected with mellow gravity on all that had happened. Even now it was still odd to realize that by a kind of decree he had separated himself from other men, that he was actually an ordained Protestant minister, the Reverend Adam Mallory.

His experience on the *K-13* had brought that about of course. He had not thought of anything very sharply or clearly in those hours in which death had advanced upon him with a chilly, dispassionate persistence.

Afterwards, when he lay in the Naval hospital slowly convalescing, his mother came to visit him every day. But she was more quiet than ever. She would sit beside him, scarcely uttering a sound between her greeting and her good-bye, as if words could only blunt the sensitized perceptions of her mind. Her expression seldom changed. Its cold impersonal discipline was moving. He had never loved her so much, or felt so intense a sympathy for her before.

Yet he had not realized clearly what had happened to him until the war itself was over, and he had been discharged. Without thinking, he had become converted to his mother's faith.

He knew now that his early iconoclasm had been callow. He had been impressed at the time because heresies could be proved. But now he could believe in the larger concept and remain quite untroubled by inconsistencies. It seemed to him inevitable that he should, after all, become a clergyman.

When he told his mother, she did not seem surprised. Yet it actually appeared to him as if her pale face receded a little way off as he spoke, and that her eyes rested upon

him with a fixed remoteness as though they gazed at him from a cloud. She murmured that it was a sign that God had forgiven her.

That Autumn Adam entered theological school. But he entered it with a concealed, patient, and satiric enemy. Like the seeds of weakness and vanity in poor Giles, the bitter seeds in Zacharias, the ruthless ones in Julian, there were seeds in Adam that must come up, too. They were there, though he did not know it, the hardy seeds of the dismaying quest for truth.

In the Summer before his last term, it happened that Adam, together with his mother and Cousin Daniel, went to a New England town to attend the series of Bible conferences which was an annual event there.

It was a peaceful, pale evening when they arrived. The wide roads were darkened by fine trees, and the air was cool and sweet like spring water. Many people were strolling in the streets, mostly clergymen and missionaries with their families, but here and there a few who were evidently laymen of authority.

The Mallorys made their way toward the boarding house that had been recommended to them, electing to walk after their tiresome journey.

All at once their progress was impeded by one of the groups. A middle-aged woman, rather thin and worn, and wearing a black silk dress, stopped to greet Cousin Daniel with surprise. She was Mrs. Blesscomb, the wife of a dead missionary, and had met Cousin Daniel years ago in Africa. She then introduced her brother, Mr. Image, a man with a handsome, red face, a thick mane of white hair, and a thick, snowy moustache; and her daughter, Antoinette, a tall girl of about eighteen, who stood quietly back in the shadows.

They all stood chatting awkwardly for a moment, for it was plain that Cousin Daniel did not have the least recollection of her; but before they broke up, Mrs. Blesscomb, saying that she had a summer home here, asked them to come to dinner tomorrow night.

The next day was full of meetings and discussions, and in the evening they set out for the address Mrs. Blesscomb had given them.

Her home was on the outskirts of the town, a small, white house. Mrs. Blesscomb welcomed them in weak tones that had a peculiarly complaining sound.

While they were all taking stock of one another, Antoinette Blesscomb came in in a white dress and greeted them.

Adam immediately sat up. He had not been able to make out her face the night before. It was very attractive, even though her chief claim to good looks lay only in the soft, rosy colour of her excellent complexion. But her most effective quality was her great dignity, a pleasant slowness and serenity that had a feeling of reassurance in it. There was something enchanting about that aspect of maturity, the lack of anything selfish and hysterical, in so young a girl.

When they went in to dinner, however, Adam's attention was drawn from Miss Blesscomb by a startled notice of the amounts of plain food that her mother and Mr. Image were rapidly stowing away. While Cousin Daniel mumbled inaudibly, and Mrs. Mallory sat in her withdrawn stillness, Adam stared as Mrs. Blesscomb and her brother helped themselves to three mammoth baked potatoes apiece and several pork chops as large as fists. At the same time they attacked the other dishes which the country girl had set upon the table, heaping their plates with biscuits, fresh peas, and sliced tomatoes. When a strawberry shortcake came on afterward, it, too, was completely demolished.

As soon as the meal was over, Mr. Image lowered his head for final prayer. But though he closed his eyes and tried hard to concentrate, Adam's mind was occupied only with a simple wonder about where they had put all that food.

Just then, opening his eyes for an instant, he was startled to see that Antoinette Blesscomb was calmly and judiciously studying him, in a way that suggested she had, perhaps, been doing so for some time previously. What struck him

most was the fact that she neither blushed nor showed any other sign of discomposure at her detection, but continued equably to examine him as if it did not matter in the least whether he himself knew it or not. He opened his mouth in a rather idiotic grin. Only then did she lower her eyes with a gravely reverent expression.

He now felt decidedly interested in her. And during the short while they all lingered after dinner, he asked her if she would care to take a walk with him tomorrow. She said she would be very glad to in an approving tone, so that Adam had the feeling she had expected him to suggest something like that.

The next day he and Antoinette wandered out of the town together, and up one of the hills, following the course of a brook. Full of safe topics, the walk had nevertheless the enchantment of all such expeditions. Antoinette talked quite steadily, though it was impossible to remember a word that she said almost from the moment she had finished saying it. Her sentences, mostly about activities concerned with some church she attended, and full of innumerable vague names and unintelligible references, were so irrelevant that they scarcely ever made sense, yet flowed so easily at the same time that they never lost their agreeable serenity. And Adam rather dazedly perceived that she in turn comprehended nothing he said, answering him in the most haphazard way, as if what he uttered was just as meaningless. Yet at the same time he felt she understood him on some simple comfortable plane. He was puzzled, disturbed, yet half in love with her before he returned.

He was entirely in love with her before the Bible conferences were over. There was nothing to prevent his marrying early, nor was there any objection from anyone. Antoinette, herself, had probably made up her mind to marry him after that first thoughtful scrutiny during Uncle Ralph Image's after-dinner prayer.

Mrs. Mallory said nothing of what passed in her own mind. Nevertheless, she seemed to like Antoinette. It was

interesting to see them together. Adam listened to Antoinette talking to his mother in the same wildly wandering fashion in which she addressed him, and then to his astonishment heard his mother answering back almost as nonsensically. They seemed to have reached an understanding without words.

When Adam, with Antoinette's mild, soft kiss on his lips, went back to theological school, he wrote her long, fervent letters full of thoughts about everything. He received from her almost equally long replies that were about nothing, and which so seldom finished up with the topic they began that he chuckled with the tenderest reminiscence at the picture they evoked of her identity. They seemed, indeed, to make their only statement in the degree of their length. He noticed that she was very careful to write exactly one page less than each letter she answered. When he wrote seven pages, she replied in six; if he wrote eight, she returned seven. Curious and amused, he tested this by writing her a letter of two pages. Back came her reply, after just the right interval of days, in one.

The following Spring, about the time when Alfred Zacharias had been approved for his first faculty appointment, and when Will Giles, clearing his throat with a cough, had said for the first time to his round, startled face in the mirror, "Dr. Giles!" and when Julian Gamble had been occupied in securing his first divorce as noisily as possible, Adam was ordained, and in the week following married Antoinette Blesscomb.

At Antoinette's wish they went to New York for their honeymoon. But the New York she wished to see turned out to be a matter of churches and museums and the more improving entertainments. Adam would wander with her through the Museum of Natural History while Antoinette gravely considered groups of stuffed animals in their correct habitats.

And then, with the odd honeymoon over, he entered upon his first pastorate, having taken a church in northern New York State in a village called Orion Mills.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

AS ADAM NOW hastened through the city street on his way to the maternity hospital, he reflected what a long distance it was from his first impulse of ardour to the reality of his duties as a country parson. And what a longer distance from his raptures of idealization to his present mournful acceptance of Antoinette as she was!

The first in a series of surprises after he had settled in Orion Mills had been the discovery that Antoinette was the most sloven housekeeper imaginable. For a long time he supposed that the immense disorder with which he was surrounded sprang only from the difficulty of opening up the large, shabby house that went with his pastorate.

But, as the weeks had slipped by, there had never been any change in the kitchen, where unwashed plates were set down everywhere with food deposits slowly hardening on them like baked designs, where used saucepans were piled with the greatest indifference in the clogged sink, and where innumerable other articles were heaped all about in a kind of arranged wildness, so as to suggest that the mere placing of them must have been a task of exacting care.

The daily help of a country girl had been secured. But even this had not made much difference. For as fast as the girl could clean up, Antoinette blandly managed to disorganize, so that at nightfall, as if by magic, the house was invariably restored to its condition of the morning.

But the astonishing thing was that Antoinette herself did not seem to be aware of her own defiance of order. Perfectly fresh in her own appearance, she moved over and around the steadily accumulating debris she created, exactly as if it did not exist, calm, smiling agreeably, and unutterably complacent.

It was this attitude of hers that muddled Adam, for it was so honest as to make him imagine at first that his own senses were at fault. Perhaps it was due to this that she disarmed the community also. For her unembarrassed manner

seemed to say to any caller that her house merely happened to be upset at the time, and that she was certain to put it to rights any moment now.

And there was no doubt that Antoinette was admired, even in a community where, next to propriety, domestic skill was the chief female standard. As soon as they had arrived she had thrown herself at once, with a kind of composed energy, into the work of the church. The farmers' wives liked her immediately in spite of her aspect of benevolent grandeur. And her pervasive sweetness filled any room like sunlight.

At the church suppers, where for twenty-five cents anyone could have all the fried chicken he could eat, or at one of the cake sales on the lawn, older women clustered about her and beamed, and young girls examined her with doting eyes.

But Adam, in love with her though he still was, was so baffled and exasperated by the confusion in which he found himself living that at last he burst out. One evening, as he tormentedly tried to find a pair of clean pyjamas in a vast huddle of soiled laundry, and tripped over a cup and saucer on the floor in the process, he demanded:

"Do things always have to be like this? Aren't they ever going to be straightened out?"

Antoinette ceased brushing her hair, and gave him an earnest scrutiny that seemed to study his mood without lending the slightest importance to whatever reasons had caused it. She did not say anything, and Adam went on confusedly:

"I don't see why everything should have to be mixed up all the time. Why, this is the worst-looking house in the place!"

Antoinette began to brush her hair again with beautiful measured strokes that it was a pleasure to watch.

"Yes," she said vaguely, "I think they really might have given us a better house—not so large, you know, and then, too, the roof leaks. I was speaking about it only the other

day to someone. Who was it now? Let me see . . ."

"I'm not talking about the house itself," Adam broke in, almost shouting, as if trying to make her understand by the wild expedient of mere noise. "I'm talking about the way you keep it!"

She cast upon him a look that reproached his excess with gentle dignity and yet had no rancour in it.

"It's been so hot today," she said soothingly. "And all those flies! A good night's rest, that's what you need."

He gulped and opened his mouth. He saw that she had not the slightest idea of what he had been saying. A mixture of frustration, fury, and a kind of helpless tenderness, all knocked about in his head at once. He emitted a bewildered laugh, whereupon she too smiled genially as if everything had been peacefully settled.

The dawning suspicion that Antoinette was nearly brainless was accompanied by the surprised realization that her lack of brains did not in the least prevent him from loving her.

At first in the quiet evenings he had talked in the strain of his letters to her, pouring out all sorts of theories and ideas. These grand thoughts were not very intelligible, nor in much relationship to one another. But instead of merely boring Antoinette, it was plain they made her actually uncomfortable. She disliked his ideas, not because they were foolish, but simply because they were ideas.

With astonishment he perceived that she did not share even his religious convictions. Now that he knew her so much better, knew every tone of that level, agreeable voice, every quality of that assured and empty gaze she so entrancingly bent upon him, he began to wonder whether, indeed, Antoinette had any religious feeling at all. And while he continued to love her, Adam was rasped by the uneasy sense that she was not actually in love with him. This doubt became a conviction quite early in their married life, on, in fact, their first Christmas Eve.

On that particular afternoon toward twilight, Adam had

come home across the white land, breathing in the air gratefully. He was dragging a boy's sled, on which was a small balsam tree that he himself had cut down. He had previously bought some ornaments for it, and in the closet of his study were some carefully wrapped presents that he had stealthily ordered for Antoinette from New York nearly a month ago.

After supper that evening, Adam set to work to decorate his tree while Antoinette helped him. About the seriousness of both their faces as they performed this task, there was something obscurely touching. Afterwards, Adam lit candles in all the windows, and gave Antoinette her presents, and swelled to see how much they pleased her. She had got him nothing, he noticed, but he did not want anything. But then, with the air of making him the best present anyone could, and the only one that mattered, she looked away, and told him in a voice that was too idle and casual to be anything but a protection, that she rather thought she might possibly be going to have a baby.

Adam gaped at her. He knew what he was supposed to feel, but he was not at all sure what he really did feel. Was he glad? Of course! And excited, yes, and obscurely surprised, and full of tenderness that now struck at his first disillusionment in her like a kind of remorse.

He went over quickly, and put his arms around her passionately. She submitted to his kiss, as if expecting it was his duty to be thus moved and appreciative. But that was all, and she drew away then without awkwardness, but with a peculiar finality in her manner. Then in her measured voice she chilled him with aimless phrases which did not make sense but which he had come to understand at last as one comes to understand the inarticulate language of a familiar child. What her voice and wandering sentences said was that henceforth she wanted no more of his embraces, and assumed that he ought to feel exactly the same way about it.

He had been silent the rest of the evening, which did not

last long. But that night, as he lay in bed listening to her placid breathing by his side, he could not force sleep to come to him. He had become more and more nervous, his thoughts beginning to travel in a circle with insane rapidity.

At last he heard a clock strike three. He stirred and groaned. He was beset with the most melancholy apprehensions, though what they were about he could not say. Pointlessly, as though he were engaged in battering his head against a wall, his thoughts returned again and again to Antoinette in a kind of exhausted obsession.

He felt he could not lie here another minute. He was worn out, yet more sleepless than ever. Thinking that if perhaps he ate something it might restore him to calmness, he got up and went down to the kitchen. But he could not find anything there he really wanted, and presently he wandered up forlornly to his study and lit the lamp. He opened a book, but only looked at it blankly.

And sitting there, haggard and exhausted, he felt his mind give a great leap, as if at a flash of illumination. Suddenly he found an explanation of Antoinette that relegated him to the position of a victim in the universal male self-deceit.

For it struck him now that without the least compunction she used attraction and love as a practical expedient and did not suppose that such things had any importance in themselves. They were the servants of her purpose as she in turn was the servant of the will that made all the earth writhe in continuance of the multiple forms of life.

This rebellious conclusion which now passed through Adam's brain, as he gazed at the lamp upon his table and heard the wind sweeping around the house in snow-filled gusts, affected him to such an extent that he actually felt his brow grow moist. His face was ludicrous with an aghast resentment.

Good God, could it be that all men were equally deluded? Could they, too, be fools, the poets and philosophers and earnest thinkers, the men of science and the men of religion, whose most solemn efforts were but unconscious pompous

attempts to abet the vast insensate urgency of a female universe?

For if this were so, he told himself, this unsettling conception trembling from the nerves of the night, then the loftiest struggles of men served merely to protect the reproductive scheme, and to all aspiration there was hence nothing but a dismal joke.

Adam saw at last the grey light come into the sky, and presently heard the door open, and beheld Antoinette peering in at him as she asked him if he were all right, was anything the matter?

He looked at her stupidly. Her deeply refreshed appearance, her aspect of some perfectly functioning machine, seemed to bear out his tormented conclusions of the night. But these conclusions, which had been so vivid only a moment before, were suddenly gone, so that he could scarcely remember what they were about. Yet, gazing at Antoinette now, a feeling of sadness rode over him at the betrayal of the first of those promises held out by his youthful blood.

And to escape an unfathomable sense of disappointment, Adam had thereafter plunged more feverishly than before into the work of his country church, seeking out the most uncomfortable duties and even inventing totally useless additional ones. But his efforts were not very successful.

When he had first arrived he had plunged into a round of calls throughout the tract of rolling inland country. He would bounce along in his brand-new Model T Ford sedan over innumerable dirt roads. Then he would get out and walk across a farmyard, and be shown into a gloomy, overcrowded, but well-dusted parlour that often had decorated texts over the doorways and the dismal portraits of dead relatives on the walls in ornate, gilded frames. Sitting there, mostly with the women of the farm, and accepting with many compliments a piece of cake and a glass of milk, he would restlessly exchange the local items of news, or discuss the trivial plans for church activities.

But he was invariably disturbed on these occasions to notice how the faces of the men of the farm lifted quickly and guiltily at his approach, and how their voices abruptly ceased, as if there were something sinful about even the most ordinary talk.

And once when he went to the schoolhouse, where nearly every Friday evening square dances were held which almost everyone attended, he was puzzled and troubled by his reception. Inside, under the lamps swung from chains, could be seen the engrossed, sweating faces of the men and women as they jigged up and down to the screech of a fiddle, accompanied by a confusion of cries and a tremendous clumping of feet. Outside in the shadows younger men, who had fetched jugs of hard cider along, prowled and muttered together, and laughed defiantly as they took huge swigs in the hope of getting as drunk as possible as soon as possible, so that they might boast about this later on.

But the moment Adam's presence was detected, the young men slunk into the bushes, while inside, the raucous voice of the caller of dances grew subdued, the fiddle sounded vaguely timorous, and the dancers themselves became self-conscious. Adam did not stay long, and did not attempt to visit one of these entertainments again.

That Spring, Mr. Image and Mrs. Blesscomb, having been informed of Antoinette's condition, arrived in Orion Mills for a few weeks with an air of taking charge.

Indeed, Mr. Image's stern manner seemed to say to Adam, even at their first handclasp of greeting, that it was a selfish, almost an abominable thing he had done, to have glutted himself in the callous knowledge that someone else would have to take the consequences. He hovered over Antoinette as if she were the innocent victim of a savage attack.

Nevertheless, there were compensations for their visit. As Mrs. Blesscomb's faint, moaning voice began to echo persistently through the house, things magically began to improve, to be scrubbed, polished, and stored away, until the house itself seemed to wear an almost surprised look.

Mr. Image and Mrs. Blesscomb were often in private conferences. The outcome of these discussions was that Antoinette should go to New York and join them there just before her time came. They would go down now and take an apartment in readiness, and the baby could be born in a hospital under the supervision of the best doctors. Adam himself would be sent for afterwards when it happened.

It was plain that Mr. Image and Mrs. Blesscomb looked already upon the prospective baby as their own. Adam was at first resentful, but as Antoinette made no objections, he kept silent. But it was clear that his acquiescence had not even been considered necessary.

The last Sunday before Antoinette's departure was a glittering day in August. In the hot bright world the air was torpid. But the listless feeling was soothing. It was pleasant simply to breathe and be still. Outside the open windows of the church, the bees made a faint, sleepy din; and under the long, sagging shed, where a few cars were also parked, some tethered horses harnessed to buggies switched their tails gracefully at flies, or lifted and dropped a hoof in languid irritation.

In the church itself, Adam gazed down from his platform upon the perspiring faces of his congregation. To his right was the small organ, pumped by foot pedals and having all its stops ornamented with gold-coloured German script. In front of it sat the middle-aged spinster who was the organist. Below were the high-backed benches from which his rural congregation stared up in peaceful expectancy.

There were visitors today Adam noticed before he began his sermon. They were a little knot of men and women in the very last row, whose brighter clothes and knowing faces indicated that they were city people. Undoubtedly they had come over from the island in the lake that was leased every summer by the big utility corporation in the city of Marathon for the benefit of its more favoured employees. These arrived in relays during the warm months,

sang around campfires, paddled canoes, and fished and swam. They were not often to be seen in Orion Mills, which had little to attract them. But the handful of visitors today had undoubtedly come to be entertained by the spectacle of a country church.

Adam's eyes dropped now to the large Bible opened out in front of him. He turned the pages and then cleared his throat. He began to speak rather slowly. There was something appealing about him. He looked very young. His quiet voice was curiously moving. And today, too, he spoke unusually well. He did not talk long, but when he was through, the congregation seemed stirred. After the services, as he stood at the door with Antoinette at his side exchanging smiles and greetings, he noticed that the little knot of city visitors were lingering at a distance and eyeing him with the most alert interest. They waited until the rest had gone before they approached.

They were three men and two women. The women had nondescript, middle-class faces, and conveyed an effect of mild sophistication. The men had a prosperous appearance, and radiated innocent selfsatisfaction. The leader of the group, red-faced, jovial and charming in a blunt way, held out his hand to Adam. His warm smile was infectious, and his eyes held a greedy shine of interest.

"My name is Lutrell—Jennings Lutrell," he announced, "and we're all of us from Marathon. That was a remarkably fine sermon. To tell you the truth, we were pretty much surprised—didn't expect anything like it!"

Adam uttered a polite banality of thanks, but he was flattered, for he saw that he had impressed them very much. Why, they were even a little excited! The women were considering him with speculative interest, and the approval of the men was no less definite. And though he guessed that Mr. Lutrell was worldly and coarse-grained, he recognized also his unaffected good sense, and responded to something heartening in him.

He was surprised the next instant to hear Antoinette

suggest in her calm, murmuring voice that these casual visitors might like to drop in at the house before returning to their island camp. They agreed at once, and proceeded in a body, making those enthusiastic sounds with which the members of any assemblage reassure one another of their good intentions.

The house was in its usual wild disarray, but Mr. Lutrell and his friends had hardly stepped inside before Antoinette said in her benevolent manner:

"It would have been such a pleasure to have asked you all to dinner, but my little country girl is so very young, you know. Of course, I'm grateful to have her at all—I don't know what I'd do without her."

And these words of praise, accompanied by a smile of endearing forgiveness, seemed to say at once that the hired girl was the most unforgivable creature conceivable, and that all this disorder was due solely to her.

Adam looked at his wife carefully. Why had she invited these people, and why was she so deliberately trying to make a good impression on them? Certainly her sunny sweetness was already having its results. The two city women were clacking away with the greatest animation, and Antoinette now lowered her eyes and murmured something about going away to the city tomorrow, in which the word "hospital" was dropped with seeming irrelevance. Her audience at once emitted enraptured sounds, and Mr. Lutrell and his friends beamed upon her. With instinctive strokes she had created the most sympathetic picture possible: the helpless, innocent young couple, a man of God and his devoted wife, on the verge of having their first baby. And these things, of course, were all true, so it was impossible to accuse Antoinette of actual hypocrisy. Nevertheless, a resentment of her shrewdness passed across Adam's mind along with his wonder at her actions. Just then he heard Mr. Lutrell say to him in a voice that mingled blandness with authority:

"I wonder if you'd like to come to Marathon sometime

this Fall, Mr. Mallory, to conduct services one Sunday in our church? Our present minister is a fine man, but the plain fact is he's getting old. What churches need today is new blood and young men with vision—young men like you! Maybe this meeting will lead to something interesting for all of us."

Mr. Lutrell sent him a kind of significant leer and seemed to restrain himself with difficulty from following it with a wink. Adam actually stammered in his surprise. In his guilelessness it had not occurred to him that they were this much interested, but he now saw that Antoinette had divined that fact at first glance, and had acted promptly to increase it.

Now Mr. Lutrell shook hands briskly, and said they would have to be going, but that this meeting had certainly been a great pleasure. The door closed behind them, and Adam gazed solemnly at his wife.

Her own eyes surveyed him with the warmest approval.

"I was afraid in church for a moment you wouldn't realize, but I saw right away you did. It was a lovely sermon, and you looked so well. Of course, I think it would be better if you didn't use your right hand so much. Still, everything was all right. Yes, they've made up their minds—I'm sure of it. So we won't have to fix up the back porch after all—there really wouldn't be time."

Adam's thoughts were conflicting. He was impressed by Antoinette's astonishing swiftness in recognizing and furthering an opportunity he himself had not suspected; he was excited at the possibility of leaving Orion Mills and securing some large, prosperous city church at his age; but at the same time he protested deeply at Antoinette's ignoble astuteness. Why, she had even made capital out of her own pregnancy! It was useless to say it was for him; it was for both their sakes. The fact remained that there was something despicable about making a worldly career out of the preaching of unworldliness.

"I don't agree with you," he said scornfully. "And any-

way, I don't think I'd be interested myself, even if they were serious."

Antoinette studied him quietly. There was no rancour in her face, as if she did not take his perversity seriously. No, he was only a child in a tantrum, her serene and benevolent eyes said, a tantrum that would be best ignored until time restored his immature male equilibrium.

A feeling of contriteness all at once swept over him, an awareness that she was doing the best she knew how, and that she, for her part, had no criticism to make of him. He put his arms around her and said gently he was sorry to be so petulant, he was overwrought, tired and worried. He was worried about her going away tomorrow, of course. For a month up here he would be all alone. How eagerly he would be looking forward to joining her, to going down the moment the baby was born!

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

ONE AFTERNOON ABOUT a week after Antoinette was gone, Adam was driving over a remote road. August was now nearly at an end, and in the cap of heat there was a feeling of great stillness and lassitude.

The farms in these lonely parts sprawled along the hill-sides with a desolate aspect. It was difficult to realize that at intervals within this emanation of lifelessness was the tiny core of a man toiling unseen. In the demands of this exhausting effort, was it reasonable to expect anyone to be concerned with anything but the blunt task of keeping alive? A sense of lethargy and hopelessness engulfed Adam; gloomily he wondered how he had the effrontery ever to ask anything of these poor people.

The car jolted on through the heat and dust, and Adam suddenly noticed that his engine, which as usual he had neglected, was beginning to boil over. A cloud of steam issued from it like a kettle, and it knocked and rattled with

ominous noises. He would have to get some water somewhere.

Looking around him, he saw not far away a tumbledown farm, as miserable as a derelict, standing at the crest of a long, slow ascent. Most of the buildings were splay-backed, one of two had even collapsed, and this appearance of ruin was set off by the singular beauty of the land all about. Suddenly Adam remembered who lived here: it had been pointed out to him long ago as the home of Mrs. Vinzant, the local atheist, about whom nearly everyone had something disagreeable to say.

Adam had seen her once or twice, driving in to town for supplies in a dilapidated buggy pulled by a bony mare—a high-backed old lady of nearly seventy, with a scornful stare. She was plainly a woman of character. Her big nose was handsome; it must have been something she had had to take great pains to hide in some distant youth. With her on most occasions was her granddaughter, a young girl with very black hair. She was decidedly odd-looking.

But the car was making sounds that he thought too alarming to ignore, and he swung in over an untended road, and climbed to the dooryard of the house. The main building was bare of paint and had taken on instead the colours of many weathers. Getting out, Adam knocked a couple of times without receiving any answer, and then knocked again almost resentfully. Just then he had the peculiar sensation that he was being watched, and without knowing by what instinct, threw his glance upward. He gave a slight start at the sight of the black-haired girl perched in the fork of a tree only a few feet away and staring down at him.

He noticed simultaneously a number of trifling details. She was clutching an apple, and at the same time supporting an opened book upon her knees.

She made an incongruous picture there, for she was certainly not a child. And along with her lively curiosity, there was something inscrutable about her expression. More than ever Adam was struck by the oddity of her features.

Her brows were intensely dark, quite level, and set above eyes of contrasting lightness. Her black hair was full of strength, and her mouth rather heavy. And for all her stony immobility she gave out an impression of intensity.

For a moment Adam gaped back in surprise, so that they had the appearance of two strange animals taking stock of each other in a jungle meeting. Then, recovering himself, he sent her a friendly smile and explained his mission. But he was dumbfounded when she did not answer him at all, but with a series of rapid movements fixed the apple between her teeth and the book under one arm, and slid down the tree with a sound of scraping bark. Then instantly she had darted in front of him, fled into the house, and banged the door behind her. A profound quietness fell, exactly as if she had not been there at all. Adam stood looking foolish and annoyed at this reception. He had just made up his mind to turn away from a place so inhospitable, and chance the next farm, when the door finally opened and old Mrs. Vinzant looked out at him.

Adam, explaining again that he wanted some water for his car, found himself observed by a pair of piercing, humorous eyes. She seemed to reach some instant conclusion or other, and opening the door wider, said in a voice of great dominance and assurance:

"You're the new minister, aren't you? Come in! We don't often have visitors out here."

She led him into the principal room, exactly as if he had come to pay a call. Glancing around him quickly, he was startled. For along with some heterogeneous, garish, and obviously mail-order furnishings were a number of other articles that could not possibly have been acquired hereabouts, and that struck an outlandish, almost an exotic note. An ornate piece of Chinese brocade was draped over a hideous Morris chair, a pile of paper-backed books in some foreign language squatted upon a three-legged milking stool, and an impressionistic print of purple horses by a twilight river was hung in indifferent juxtaposition to the litho-

graphed calendar of a sentimental scene. These things, no less than the old lady herself, made Adam feel that he was in the presence of someone about whom he knew nothing but of whom there was much to know.

And sitting back now in a rusty black dress ornamented with a frill of dirty-looking lace, she was surveying him with a kind of piratical grin as if she had discovered something amusing and not very flattering about his innocent and serious face.

Her big mouth under her big nose would not stay still; it jumped and jerked under the spur of an excessive vitality. A little saliva gathered like mist about it, yet there was nothing repellent about her. And though her voice was as harsh as a parrot's, its vibrations were warming.

"I was hoping you had come here to convert me," she said. "You haven't, by any chance?"

Adam smiled but he had the quick feeling of dread familiar to most clergymen at the prospect of being frantically attacked, or drawn into some nearly insane argument.

He said no, not at all, adding dutifully that he hoped, nevertheless, that Mrs. Vinzant might care to come to church sometime.

"Why?" said Mrs. Vinzant abruptly, with an effect of pouncing on him. Her voice dropped to a wheedling note, exactly as if she were coaxing him to come out and be destroyed. "Is it that you think you might be able to teach me something?" And she looked at him with such genial derision that Adam grew angry. Indignant at being treated thus, he answered:

"Perhaps not, Mrs. Vinzant. But God, who made you in His own image, could."

The old lady burst into the most unsettling cackle imaginable. The spray gathered more visibly than ever around her convulsive mouth.

"Now I consider that a very insulting thing to say about any god. His own image, indeed! It would be a very poor

sort of god if the best he could do for himself was to look like me!"

Her beaked and wrinkled face with its winking, bright eyes, her ruffianly grin that impartially mocked Adam and herself, lent a kind of horrible appositeness to her jibe. But Adam saw now she was only hoping to shock him, and that somewhere within this seeming malice there was astonishingly a cordial, almost a tender, attitude. And indeed, as though she were content for the moment with her tiny triumph, she now switched the key of the conversation, if not the topic, and began to fire the baldest questions at him about where he had come from, how he had happened to embrace such a career as preaching, and how long he had been at it.

Adam answered uncomfortably, but the truth was he was caught by her, and no longer regretted he had entered.

The old lady, her curiosity soon satisfied, plunged on in a rattle of inconsistent talk which gave him no chance for a reply: a whole bundle of scraps of reminiscence, crazy opinions, noisy jeers, and sarcastic observations. They were for the most part exceedingly contradictory, and they flowed one into the other without the least relevance or transition. But they were held together somehow by an intangible yet definite frame of personality, and they were interesting. Adam needed to do nothing but listen with responsive attention to keep her going. He felt easier, he felt even charmed, and began to smile.

She boasted outrageously. There was something pathetic, too, in the proud way she named as her intimates people who had once been eminent or notorious but who now were old, too, or long since dead, and whose fame floated out of the past as reduced and intangible as thin perfume. "My friend, Mrs. Langtry, and I decided . . . the then Duke of Alva said to me, however . . . I told Dr. Sun Yat Sen at the time . . ."

Had she really been the friend of these opulent or celebrated persons? She was probably a very great liar. Yet certainly many extraordinary things must have happened

to anyone so egotistic and masterful. And what, in the end, was she doing here in this pitiful and shabby obscurity? Obviously existing in the utmost poverty, yet perfectly undaunted, as if scornful of that or any other circumstance, she conveyed to Adam's susceptible mind the suggestion of one of those aloof spirits he had dimly heard about, who have fled from a world they have seen too much of, and are to be encountered now and then living in remote, lost places in romantic isolation.

And though he did nothing but listen, he was aware of being lifted for the first time in a long while to a higher pitch, as if her overwhelming vitality had flowed into him, too, making him feel clever and alive and somehow more important.

But her disparagement of all virtue, her belief that it did not even exist, as if on the whole she enjoyed this idea, roused him at last, and he interjected shrewdly:

"You deny there is such a thing as good, but if you really believe that to be true, and want to tell people about it, you are trying to be good yourself."

She stopped abruptly, and her eyes fell upon him with an intimate smile. "Of course!" she said, as if surprised at his obtuseness. "Why, I haven't any doubt that you and I are the only religious people for miles around here!"

Adam gazed at her so indignantly that she burst into another villainous laugh. Just then he was all at once aware that the young girl, her granddaughter, was in the shadows of the long room somewhere behind him. How had she stolen in so noiselessly, and how long had she been there? He turned his head quickly and shot a glance at her. She was sitting in profound stillness. Her eyes had a stare that seemed almost stupid. Yet it was plain that her mind, too, was racing with thoughts of her own, so that her body looked as if it were being restrained in that posture of tautness only by the exercise of the greatest force.

For some reason Adam frowned. He took out his watch. He had no idea he had been here so long. He got up and

said he must put some water in his car and then be going. "Show him where the pump is, Louise, and get a pail," said Mrs. Vinzant good-naturedly. "And come back again! I've liked talking to you—maybe one of us will be able to convert the other!"

As Adam went out into the kitchen, where Louise had preceded him and was beginning to prime the pump, he was surprised at the peculiar freshness and feeling of stimulation that filled him. Mrs. Vinzant had certainly arrested him: a hundred thoughts, answers to her taunts, justifications of himself, tumbled about in his mind. He knew now he would certainly come back, and was only sorry he had not discovered her long before.

He now took the pump handle from Louise with a polite murmur and rapidly filled the tin bucket. As he carried it outside, she silently accompanied him. She unscrewed the radiator cap with fumbling longboned hands, and promptly dropped it to the earth. As she retrieved it, he saw her hands were actually shaking. He stared at her. In his deep interest in Mrs. Vinzant, the granddaughter had ceased to puzzle his thoughts, but he now considered her curiously. There was something provocative about that enigmatic face. Everything about her was finely tempered, he now saw, not only her long bones and delicately haggard features, but something proud and fierce in her carriage. It was no less astonishing to come upon her in this remote land than upon her garrulous, rebellious grandmother. What did she do here? What could she do here?

"Have you always lived on this farm?"

She spoke in a quick voice as if defending herself.

"No, it was when I was seven we came here. I was born in Rome. After that, though, I've been here. Why shouldn't I?"

Adam gave a slightly awkward laugh and set the pail down.

"Why, no reason, of course. I was only wondering——"

Her eyes met his with a kind of sombreness.

"Are you coming back?" she demanded.

"Yes, since your grandmother suggested it." His voice took the attitude that he was dealing with a child. "We must have a talk then, and you can tell me about Rome."

But she did not answer, and her eyes, fixed so searchingly upon his, made him feel he was being studied too earnestly for comfort.

"Good-bye," he said.

She made no reply to this, either. He got into his car, thinking to himself, "What a rude young woman"! But after all, she and her rudeness did not matter. If he did return, it would be to see Mrs. Vinzant again, not her granddaughter.

As the car swung into the main road he glanced back. Louise was standing where he had left her, looking down upon the earth as if still revolving her agitated and mysterious thoughts.

It was nearly two weeks before he called on Mrs. Vinzant again, although during that time he thought of her surprisingly often, so often it might almost be said he thought of her continuously. The fact was that the vivid impression she had made on him made everyone else in the place seem by contrast vapid and unspeakably ignorant, and Adam had been locked up here for so long a time, with Antoinette serving so inadequately as intellectual company, that he drank of his lively new acquaintance thirstily.

Still Adam kept putting off his second visit until one afternoon the mail brought a letter from Mr. Image. Uncle Ralph reported that the baby was expected any moment now; no one could understand this delay; perhaps there were going to be complications. Mr. Image ended curtly by saying he would let Adam know by telegram when anything occurred.

Adam had the immediate impulse to rush to New York. But all at once he visualized Antoinette's placid stare of wonder at his arrival, and imagined her asking him if anything had happened, was anything wrong? She did not need

him in the least, he knew; with Mr. Image and Mrs. Blesscomb there, there was nothing he could do.

Suddenly he had an overwhelming longing for the company of Mrs. Vinzant, and, without thinking about it twice, got up and started out. When he arrived at the farm it seemed more lost than ever. He knocked with the feeling that he was knocking at an abandoned house where he might expect to be answered only by the scampering of mice. However, the door was opened quickly this time by Louise, and her face flushed at the sight of him.

She told him that her grandmother had gone to town with a neighbour but would be back shortly, any minute now; wouldn't he come in? Adam entered. Sitting down, he began to ask her again about herself. Had she gone to school here? No, not at all; her grandmother had taught her. And her friends, the people she saw, who were they?

"No one ever comes here," she said, "And Grandmother doesn't like me to go anywhere."

But her relatives, Adam persisted, struck more and more by the intimations of an isolation which seemed almost desperate, and which now began to make comprehensible her suggestions of inner intensity and her appalling savage shyness; surely she had other relatives? Her mother and father were dead, of course, but——

Louise shook her head in surprise.

"Oh, no, my father is in Greece in a monastery," she explained. "But my mother ran away with a French gentleman. He took some money from a bank. They went away—to the Argentine, Grandmother thinks."

Adam winced and was immediately ashamed of it. The calmness with which she had volunteered her startling information, exactly as if it were of the most commonplace variety, heightened its shocking evocations. He felt as if he had unexpectedly come upon a character in one of those fantastic scandals of high life which were served up nauseatingly week after week to the readers of Sunday supplements, scandals in which amorous counts in silk hats,

absconding croupiers, imbecilic heiresses and millionaire drug addicts lived lives so involved and so erratic that it is quite impossible to imagine they ever ate ordinary meals or slept in ordinary beds.

"But what do you really do here?" he burst out. "By yourself, I mean?"

She seemed to take him quite literally.

"Do you want to see the pond I've just built?" she asked. "Come on—I'll show you, if you like."

She jumped up, and he followed her outside and around towards the back of the house. In a small hollow a narrow stream had been crudely dammed to make a pool. Some weedy bushes banked it on one side, and some carefully placed but irregular stones made a kind of wall on the other. In the shallow water itself a couple of surprised trout seemed to be struggling to find some way out, and together with two small turtles and a misanthropic-looking bullfrog, composed the living inhabitants.

"Well," said Adam genially, not realizing that the amiability of his tone was only belittling, "you've done quite a piece of landscaping! What a lot of work it must have been! Did it take you long?"

But as he looked at her, her face changed. She seemed all at once to regret having shown it to him. Yet he was totally unprepared for the abrupt alteration that now took place in her.

"Why did you stop here?" she demanded fiercely. "I didn't ask you to! And do you suppose it makes any difference to me what you think about anything?"

The passion in her low voice, in her hurt and angry eyes, was so out of proportion that Adam was staggered. He gazed at her in bewilderment.

Then with an effect of profound surprise he was aware for the first time of something so obvious that he was taken aback. For how had it happened that, having seen her thus, he had not immediately recognized that she was quite astoundingly beautiful?

Under the sway of the advertising posters, magazine covers, and publicity photographs that were everywhere today, he had stupidly defined her excessively black hair, her unfamiliar subtleties of line, and all her violent contrasts that ran counter to the standard and popular conceptions of beauty in women, as merely odd-looking.

But now he stared astonished, even a little uneasy, before his abrupt realization. There was no longer any hint of patronage in him. He wanted instead only to placate her.

Just then he heard the rattling of wheels and, turning, saw Mrs. Vinzant, her arms full of bundles, alighting from the neighbour's car in which she had made her trip to the village.

Mrs. Vinzant was already talking thirteen to the dozen, but Adam, who had come purposely to hear her, found himself hearing nothing when he had gone inside with her. His mind constantly darted away, yet where it went he could not say. He remained less than half an hour, and in spite of Mrs. Vinzant's protests, said he would have to be going back.

He went outside into the late afternoon sunlight and for a moment stood hesitantly. Then he took an awkward, reluctant step towards the back of the house. Louise was still there beside the pool. She was sitting very quietly. Her expression was sullen. But the look she slowly cast upon him had no active hostility in it. Then he noticed that the little pool beside her had been completely ruined. Its dam had been torn down and most of the water had already trickled off from the roiled mud. It could only have been demolished thus vandalistically in an impulse of the most intense fury.

Adam did not smile. He valued properly the inarticulate, baffled resentment behind the small incident. And he could no longer avoid taking seriously a physical beauty that was so excessive and formidable. He looked actually crestfallen.

"Why did you do it?" he faltered absurdly. "And the poor turtles—what's become of them?"

She gazed stonily at him for a moment. Then her brooding expression changed. She looked down at the muddy water as if contemplating with wonder her own childishness and folly. After a moment she lifted her fine eyes. They met his gently. She smiled. He smiled back. She rose and they began to walk silently to the car.

"Good-bye," said Adam as he got in.

"Good-bye," said Louise.

The following Sunday the little church sat once more in sultriness, reflecting the sunlight from its glistening white clapboards.

When Adam stepped upon the dais, he was startled by an intelligence of something which obscurer senses than his eyes had apprehended in advance. He then looked quickly and saw Louise, well up in the front in the church.

She was wearing the most outlandish costume imaginable. An immense picture hat that might have been some trophy of her grandmother's, and was now circled with artificial flowers that did not belong upon it, was fixed on her abundant hair. She wore a black satin dress with this which was certainly too old for her, together with long gloves coming to her elbows. But though these clothes made her grotesque, they did not conceal the extraordinary and unconventional attractiveness he had been so late in perceiving.

Yet her unexpected appearance here mysteriously annoyed Adam. As he gazed at her, she sent him back a warm and knowing smile, like the smile thrown across the footlights to an actor from an admirer. He looked away hastily and was careful not to look back again.

Coming down afterwards, and waiting until everyone else had gone, he turned toward her where she stood hopefully and expectantly.

"Well, it was certainly a surprise to see you here," he said with a cheerfulness that tried to point out his belief in

the meaninglessness of her action. "What made you decide to come?"

Her expression reacted instantly to his hostile tone. She seemed to understand more than he himself knew he meant, and she looked at him humbly, almost meekly, like someone who, possessing goodness and tolerance, asks only for a sign of these things in others. There was no longer any suggestion of childishness about her; on the contrary, there was a feeling of the greatest maturity, so that her grave, beseeching eyes dominated even the grotesque costume with which she was so ignorantly fripped out. Adam was surprised at suddenly finding himself the greater child of the two and grew more resentful than ever. And conscious, too, of her bewildering loveliness and the power of that loveliness, he struggled angrily to make it of no moment.

"Well, now you have come, I hope you'll come again," he said curtly. "Perhaps you may even get to like it. I suppose your grandmother is waiting for you outside?"

"Oh, no," she said. "I walked in."

"Walked!" he repeated, startled. He looked at her in her stiff, uncomfortable clothes, noting her slim, rather sexless legs in their black stockings, and her dusty shoes. Why, it was all of seven miles to Mrs. Vinzant's home, yet she had trudged through that dust and heat in her uncomfortable finery, and she was now preparing to trudge back with nothing but the memory of his ungracious lack of appreciation, his boorishness!

His mood veered violently. "But you can't walk back!" he exclaimed. "I'll drive you home." And all at once he was captured by another idea, which knocked aside his obscure hesitations. "Why not have dinner with me first? And then I'll take you home afterward."

Her eyes danced; abruptly she was a young girl again. But she tried to conceal her pleasure as she said casually: "I should like to very much."

Adam hastily reassured himself he was merely bestowing a little harmless kindness. Yet he had a peculiarly guilty

feeling when he brought her inside and asked the hired girl to lay another plate. The way this request was received in deep silence with a sideways look made him frown indignantly.

Louise herself was too excited to notice anything. At the table, where everything was put on at once—a platter of fricasseed chicken, a bowl of potatoes, a salad covered with sweetened vinegar, and a pumpkin pie—she sat with much gravity. But Adam saw she was completely happy, and thinking again of her unstable parentage and the uncertain outlines of whatever future awaited her, he felt troubled.

When dinner was over, he asked her if she were ready. Her face fell, she looked around the room regretfully, and rose with a sigh.

They drove over the back road through the buzzing heat. They were both silent now, yet perfectly at ease, and their quietness seemed to hold some harmonious interchange. But at last, seeing that they were not a mile away from her home, he broke the silence by asking her with a little reminding smile whether she hadn't repaired her turtle pool yet.

She shook her head.

"Why not plant some pond lilies in it?" he asked. "I've always liked pond lilies—their dank smell, not like anything else, and the complete whiteness."

She looked at him quickly. "I know where we can get some now," she said. "Would you like to? It's only a little way from here!"

Her voice almost pleaded, and she looked delighted when, after a moment of obscure hesitation, he assented. The meeting was being strangely prolonged, one suggestion or activity seeming to lead so naturally to another. But what was wrong about enjoying this utterly casual outing? He could prove easily there was nothing wrong about it if only he did not admit his enjoyment. That was the only thing wrong.

They drove down a side road at Louise's direction, dipped

into a track below an abandoned farm, and then, bursting their way through woods where branches scraped and scratched at the car as it lurched along, came to a small lake in the hollow of a clearing. It was still, dark, and ominous, and around its banks fallen trees rotted in the mud. Near one shore, spiky grass and elongated water shrubs pushed to the shallow surface, and here, as Louise had promised, clumps of lilies floated in the midst of their rich green leaves.

They got out and went down to the water's rim. Before he could stop her, Louise ran out along a partially submerged log. But in her eagerness she lost her balance and cried out as she made frantic efforts to recover it. Adam ran out into the water, caught her hands and drew her back. There were ugly-looking rocks under the surface everywhere.

"You could have hurt yourself badly, falling there!" he said irritably. "Do you always do things like that—without thinking?"

"But you said you liked them so much."

"Not enough for you to kill yourself to get some for me."

She raised her exquisite eyes, seeming to express a preposterous denial of this, then stooped and began to throw pebbles into the little lake. Adam sat down on a rock and tried to dry his wet legs in the sun. He observed the ripples widen where the pebbles fell.

"Anyway, I wouldn't mind dying so much," Louise said idly after a moment.

"You say that because you're young. That's the way all young people talk."

"But you're young, too."

"Well, I don't want to die yet."

"No, because you've got something you want to do very much. Do you know what I think?"

He encouraged her to go on.

"I think," she said, "everyone really dies only when he wants to—either when he's done what he set out to do, or

else when he's given up—really given up—all hope of doing it. Then you die, and not until then.”

“Well, that would mean everyone is a suicide, wouldn't it?”

“I suppose so: Maybe everyone is.”

He laughed. “What about the people in hospitals who die under operations, or get run down by cars, or get murdered, even?”

“I don't think they'd let those things happen to them, somehow, if they really wanted to live.”

“But how about babies then,” he persisted, amused at carrying out her fantasy to its logical end. “Do they commit suicide, too, before they can even think, or know what anything is about?”

“Maybe,” she said earnestly. “Maybe way inside their minds there is something that makes them realize and makes them give up trying to keep alive. Because just to do that, everyone does have to try hard every day.”

Her face remained perfectly serious, and Adam answered good naturedly, “Well, anyway, if you're right you're safe enough, because you certainly haven't even begun whatever it is you're going to want to do.”

“Yes,” she said. “I suppose that's so. Yes, I want to live. But then I don't suppose anyone really knows either.”

The sun was blazing down less fiercely. Storm clouds were gathering in one quarter.

“It looks like rain,” Adam said. “And I ought to be getting you home. Your grandmother will be worried.”

“It doesn't matter—not this time,” she murmured. But she got up and began to walk slowly back to the car. “I've had such a beautiful day,” she said in her low, quick voice. “And I'm sorry about your getting wet, and the pond lilies. I didn't know they'd be so hard to reach.”

They drove on up to the main road, and all at once, long before he expected it, Adam seemed to come out of a dream to see Mrs. Vinzant's tumbledown farm. He went inside to say hello to the old lady, though he was somehow not in the mood now for the sound of that sharp tongue. But Mrs.

Vinzant, looking at him and Louise quickly, turned out to be singularly silent today. There was even a feeling of constraint in the room, from which it was harder to take an abrupt departure than a more welcoming atmosphere. Louise moved in and out, quite still now, and busy about some neglected household task or other. Adam was fumbling for some pretext to make his departure seem easy, when the rural phone, which at intervals had been jangling with assorted rings in the last few minutes, rang again, and Louise, attentively noting it, went at once to answer.

"It's for you," she said to Adam.

Picking up the receiver, he heard the voice of the agent in the railroad station saying he had been trying to locate Adam—there was a telegram for him. He then read the message out awkwardly in the toneless voice of a reciting schoolboy:

BOY, NINE POUNDS, ANTOINETTE DOING WELL. HOURS
TWO TO THREE AND SEVEN TO NINE. BEST WISHES AND
HEARTY CONGRATULATIONS.

RALPH IMAGE

Adam replaced the receiver on the hook with an unsteady hand. He was bewildered to find himself surprised by an event that he had been expecting so long. Hadn't he really believed it was going to happen?

"I've got a son!" he exclaimed. "I'll have to go to New York on the early train tomorrow morning, of course. Well!"

Mrs. Vinzant smoothed her dress with a smile. She seemed to be thinking, and to be comforted by whatever it was she thought. Excitedly, Adam went on talking in disjointed sentences without much awareness of what he was saying. He no longer needed a pretext to go gracefully, and he said good-bye to Mrs. Vinzant in a moment. Louise had disappeared.

Adam went outside. The farm lay in its familiar stillness that was like the stillness of death. A few large drops of

rain fell scatteringly. The colour was out of the air and the earth. He peered all about him for Louise, thinking she must have come out, too. But there was no sign of her anywhere. He felt indefinitely annoyed by her unnecessary disappearance, as if at some exhibition of undisciplined temperament. He got into the car and drove rapidly home. He packed his bag and made preparations as if there were a great rush. But when he was through, the evening stretched interminably, and hoping to end it, he went to bed early. For a long time he tossed restlessly, his mind tossing, too, before he fell asleep.

In the morning a bank of mist had rolled in and hung damply in the depressions as Adam walked through the empty road to the railway station. Only one or two other passengers were waiting there, the superintendent of the milk factory and a couple of travelling salesmen. The train came in on time, lighting up the wisps of fog with ugly luridness. Ah the moment that Adam picked up his bag and started towards it, he heard someone come running up from behind. He turned and saw Louise. In her white face her big eyes looked desperate. Abruptly she thrust out towards him a handful of wet water lilies. He took them blankly. He saw she was quite unable to speak. He, too, remained silent, but jumping on board the platform, looked down and waved.

Her face loomed up out of the fog, seeming forlorn. The deepest, bitterest pang struck Adam to the heart. He was coming back, of course, but he knew now he was not coming back to her; he was saying good-bye not at the outset of a brief journey away from her, but of an immensely long one. For though he did not as yet dare to examine the feelings that filled him, he knew he must not see the strange girl again.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

AND NOW ADAM had reached the hospital where his wife and her child were lying. He found Antoinette in a room on the third floor, and though he was not surprised, he was annoyed by finding Mr. Image and Mrs. Blesscomb there at this moment also.

Adam stared down. Antoinette looked spent and weak, but gazed at him with her undiminished serenity. She murmured his name and smiled, but as her eyes remained fixed upon him like that, they searchingly regarded him like the uncomfortably prescient eyes of many invalids. Without knowing why, Adam was seized with an obscure pang of guilt. He bent hastily and kissed her cheek, and asked her in a muffled voice how she was feeling.

But she continued to stare at him like that without answering. Then all at once, as if dismissing him from her consciousness, she closed her eyes.

Adam sat down awkwardly. Mr. Image pursed up his mouth and nodded.

"She must not talk much yet," he said in a low voice. "No excitement. She had a very hard time."

Mrs. Blesscomb retired meekly to a corner, and for nearly five minutes they all three remained in this uncomfortable stillness while Antoinette breathed on tranquilly. The atmosphere had the gloomy decorum of a funeral.

But at last Mr. Image coughed, and rose saying:

"And now shall we have a look at the baby?"

Adam followed him out eagerly into the corridor, and along this into another one, with whose windings Mr. Image appeared to be perfectly familiar. All at once they came to a space where a large pane of plate glass was set in the wall. About this a number of people were now clustered, pushing and teetering for a better view.

On the opposite side of the glass, in a series of tilted baskets, each with a card bearing the name of its occupant affixed to it, some twenty or more newborn infants could

be seen. Most of the babies were sleeping soundly, but a few were screaming unheard behind the thick glass and making convulsive kicks. Among them a nurse with a surgical mask was now actively moving.

Adam's eye at once found the basket bearing his own name, and he stared with a gulp at the small creature it contained. His face had an expression of ludicrous surprise, as if some unconscionable trick had been played upon him. But in an instant he hastily amended this breach of manners and fixed upon his features the semblance of an approving smile.

At the same time he was trying to account for his own feeling of shock and dismay. For it was difficult, it was almost impossible, for anyone inured to the vast body of sentimental assumption to admit the fact that for the first few days, or even weeks, of its advent, the young of the human species is somewhat repellent in appearance. And though he was now excited and moved by all those plain and dignified reflections which are engendered by the momentous occasions of birth and death, he was startled by the ugliness of infancy. Still, he was reassured by noticing that his own offspring, at any rate, did not appear any worse than the rest. Looking at them all, he was suddenly struck by a wonder about the impending, unknown destinies at whose embodiments he was gazing.

Very likely this handful of lives before him, his son's among them, would come to nothing. They would merely take seriously their meaningless aches and disasters, their quickly spent youths, their small triumphs, their own loves and breedings, and in the end the final blankness of their own deaths. Yet it might be that in this faintly stirring mass there was also some rare, superior spirit; another Goethe, another Socrates might actually be lying here in grotesque helplessness as they, too, once had surely lain. But good heavens! Was it not equally possible that he was now looking upon the infant encasement of some future notorious poisoner or infamous tyrant?

And certainly, if neither of these interesting possibilities, whether admirable or deplorable, was true of this particular collection of new lives on exhibition in front of him, it was a fact that they would be true in time, in the course of some eventual generation or other that took root from them in turn.

Adam looked at his own child, and saw that in the vicissitudes of fortune here was the forerunner of a race that must inevitably include poets, defectives, aristocrats, scholars, drunkards, philosophers, prostitutes, scientists, lunatics, criminals, and saints. He stood appalled by the thought of that monstrous procession of lives trooping away into the remote distance of posterity—this motion to which he had given continuance like his father before him.

Meanwhile, there was certainly his responsibility for the rearing of this puny ancestor he looked upon with such wild thoughts.

And from these wonderings, these inner excitements and disturbances, he was abruptly recalled to the proprieties of life by hearing Mr. Image's hearty voice directly in his ear, and saw that Mr. Image had been steadily watching him instead of the baby, without, of course, ever suspecting what had been passing through his mind.

"Well, what do you say to that fine little fellow? Antoinette, by the way, insists on naming him Ralph. I suppose you have no objections?"

Mr. Image smiled with a great show of teeth, as if daring Adam to have any; and too bewildered by his own emotions, Adam said no, of course not.

Mr. Image slightly relaxed. His voice grew milder.

"Well, well, he shan't lack for the best of care. We will see what we can do. Mother Blesscomb and I have been putting our heads together, I may as well tell you. We have more or less decided to take a hand in this young man's upbringing. We may even decide to go back with you. However, we can discuss all this later on. And now, as I think Antoinette must rest, perhaps you had better leave this time

without disturbing her. We'll tell her you'll be back to-morrow."

Mr. Image held out his hand with an effect of cordiality, yet the assumptions by which Adam was dismissed were so clear that he felt exactly as if he had been taken instead by the collar and propelled towards the door. But what was the use of staying? Antoinette obviously did not in the least require seeing him; he was only too plainly not needed here.

He turned away, and reflected that he was at least bound where he would be welcome. After an absence of more than a year, he was about to see his mother and Cousin Daniel again.

And all his disquieting thoughts, his baffled sense of uselessness, fell away from him at the sight of his old house on its quiet street. He climbed the brownstone steps eagerly and pulled at the old-fashioned bell knocker.

But it was the house alone that he saw without distressed eyes. His mother, unbelievably frail, had grown much older very rapidly in the few years that had passed since the war. And Cousin Daniel, lean and black, peered at him as if he scarcely knew who he was any more.

Adam tried to overcome a shocked feeling by a display of the greatest enthusiasm, as if to silence the cold, ironic statement of time with his own noisiness. He talked warmly of the newborn baby, and saw his mother's face glow with interest like the glow of a low fire; but even as it glowed it faded, and in the midst of his rushing, loud sentences, his mother all at once, and quite irrelevantly, mentioned something he himself had done as a small boy, and asked Cousin Daniel if he remembered it.

Adam realized that they were gone from him. He felt separated like a broken link both from the past and the future. He saw he no longer had any reality for these two old people; he was only a stranger who shared with them the memory of his own dead boyhood. He was unable to communicate anything to them about his present life that could really interest them. They were gente, they were

fond, but he seemed to strike them as at once dim and frightening. And then it occurred to him how much of hope must once have been lavished upon him in his early infancy, and how little it now mattered to those who had hoped.

He stared at them both, for the first time with the mature criticism in which there is only a dead love. What were they really living for, what did they now have to live for? And he thought with a faint smile of poor Louise's firm assurance that one died when one no longer had a purpose.

They had dinner in the well-remembered room, waited upon by Doris, who had become almost as old as the two old people. Afterwards, Cousin Daniel roused himself with an effort and told Adam he would like to show him his collection tomorrow. But he said the words mechanically, as if even this passion, which had once served him so well, had faded too.

Not long afterwards Cousin Daniel and his mother went to bed, and Adam was left alone in the house whose very shadows were part of his consciousness. He felt acutely lonely. His thoughts moved and circled with nervous rapidity.

He began to walk about the room with his hands in his pockets, feeling more and more friendless and depressed.

All at once the thought of Zacharias crossed his mind. Why hadn't he called up? Perhaps he ought to try to reach him himself. He searched the telephone book, but Zacharias was not listed in it. How could he get in touch with him? Perhaps if he phoned the college? Suddenly he thought of Julian Gamble. Julian would probably know Alfred's address, if he himself were in town. And he well might be.

Adam turned the pages, and at last found his name. He rang the number. After a moment a stranger's voice said hello and told him to hold the wire. He heard, at the other end a blending of faint, scarcely distinguishable sounds: a phonograph playing a popular tune, someone laughing loudly, a number of voices all going at once, and then at

last Julian's voice itself on the phone, so clearly recognizable that Adam laughed with recognizing pleasure.

For a moment Julian did not seem to understand who was speaking to him. Then his enthusiasm came out in a burst. He said impatiently he didn't know where Zacharias was to be found, but that Adam must come up here instead at once. There was warmth and eagerness in his demand. Adam smiled, and said of course, right away.

He let himself out quietly from the house like someone stealing out of a tomb. He felt better now. He was glad he was going to see his old friend.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

JULIAN GAMBLE WAS now living in a duplex studio-apartment on Central Park South. It was on the second floor of a rather dingy yet agreeable building, and through its opened French windows poured the sounds of the street: the clacking footsteps of people walking just underneath, the hooting of cabs, the rumble of trolley cars, and the ceaseless uproar of indefinable city noises. It was necessary to talk loudly inside, as if excited, and this exactly suited the mood of Julian's living atmosphere.

Indeed, as he now worked at a tilted drawing-board with a rapidity about which there was a kind of fascination, a number of people were at the moment occupying the studio and entertaining themselves in disparate ways, and the apartment itself had an artificial theatrical look.

It consisted of a principal long room, cluttered with shabby but comfortable furnishings that had evidently been rented along with it. Above ran a balcony, off which were located a kitchen, a bath and a couple of small bedrooms.

In one corner of the main studio a game of backgammon was in loud progress between a thin young man who was a newspaper reporter and a sallow-faced librettist of revues and musical comedies. A couple of showgirls, whom the

librettist had brought along with him, were exchanging gossip together nearby in a jargon as elaborate as a foreign language. It was hard to say whether or not they were strictly beautiful, but their high heels, their prominent legs shaped voluptuously in silk, the flash of their vividly coloured faces, and the affectation of their hairdresses, gave out an immediate sexual impact.

Across the room a one-eyed bootlegger's runner, who had an opened satchel at his feet full of bottles of gin, was discussing the contents of a racing form with the Polish janitor of the building, who seemed to be altogether at home here. The bootlegger was drinking his own liquor, and seemed, indeed, to be providing the party at his expense.

And sitting alone very quietly, and gazing at the tips of her own shoes with a puzzled, considering air, was Helen Willoughby, Julian's current mistress.

She had held that transient post for nearly three months now: almost a record. Yet it was not surprising. It was not only that she was a lovely ash-blonde with delicacy in every feature, but also that she was not the ordinary pretty girl, living in the city half on her wits, intermittently modelling and struggling in the theatre, but instead a young woman from a well-bred family and with an expensive, fashionable education, who had broken with everyone and thrown away everything to come and live with Julian.

Such tributes had been paid to him before; he could not remember half the girls with whom he had already had brief and casual love affairs. But always there had to be a new one; there was no refreshment, no interest for him, except in novelty and still another meaningless acquisition.

At first when he had come here and settled down to the business of being an artist in New York, he had brought home chorus girls and girls from night clubs almost in the same way a child picks up a pretty seashell from the beach with a cry of delight and is surprised later when he has it in his room to find it has somehow lost its lustre and evocations of beauty.

But Helen was different, superior, so she had lasted longer. However, as Julian now worked, he threw an occasional quick frown in her direction, for he was tired of her and wanted to get rid of her. And though she did not so much as look toward him, and remained in that tragic stillness, he knew, of course, that she was perfectly aware of this, and was desperately attempting to discover what was wrong, what had happened, and what she could possibly do to hold him. He revolved this knowledge without discomfort, but instead with a peculiar, hard satisfaction.

The chief reason why he was tired of her was that in his violent, but shallow way Julian had been attracted to someone else. This had happened only the last week or so, and the object of this particular interest was now also in the noisy room.

She, too, was pretty, though in quite another way. But it was the difficulty of acquiring her that lent her her greatest attraction. For she had not been married long, scarcely a year, and she had no great vanity or silliness to make her an easy conquest. She was plainly controlled by ideas of virtue. Moreover at that moment her husband was with her. They were Tom and Elizabeth Conger.

Tom Conger worked in a big advertising agency for whom, after an intolerable delay, Julian was now knocking out a poster for which he had somehow managed to be paid in advance. Indeed, Tom had been set by his office to dogging Julian to complete his accepted idea, and because of Elizabeth Conger rather than for any consideration of honesty, Julian for once was actually finishing something for which he had received the money previously.

Conger was dark, slim, and actually very handsome. But his good looks were almost irritating because of the weakness in his face, and his amiability was marred equally by stupidity. You saw at once he was a craven, that he could be petulant and obstinate about trifles with inferiors, that he was vain, and easily swayed by almost anyone. His young wife, a small girl, with something trim about her like

a graceful boat, had apparently plumbed these facts with thoroughness. But Julian could not sense that she despised the weak young man she had married, and wondered blankly at herself for having done such a thing, for she had not disclosed thus far a single revealing tone, or given herself away by so much as a fleeting, disdainful look.

Though he was certain that it was going to be very hard to win her, perhaps impossible, he was now subtly trying, as he had been trying from the first moment he had met her. She had spoken on the last occasion about wishing to see that new play the Barrymore brothers were now in, *The Jest*, and that was why the Congers were here this evening, for they had agreed to see it together tonight, they and Julian and Helen. But Julian was so overdue on his poster and Tom was so anxious to have it done, and Elizabeth, too, that he was doing his best to finish it before the performance, though it was clear they were going to be late.

As he filled it in with sure swiftness that held one like the exhibition of professionalism in any field, he looked up now and then at Elizabeth, who studied him and his drawing as motionlessly as if she feared to break a spell. And to his competence he gave a kind of caressing quality. There was a kind of stony look in her face, a trapped look, at once protesting and enchanted. She breathed in a lulled way and met his glance with an expressionlessness so large that it was plainly instinctive concealment.

Julian's strong magnetism was nearly impossible to define. When he chose to be charming, it was like the sudden snapping on of a light, as blinding and as unexpected. Then his gift for projecting a brief, intense warmth and his suggestion of infinite understanding made him irresistible. Even at his worst, even in his most insulting humour, which took no account of the helplessness of an adversary and was never restrained by any considerations of fair play or compassion, the pull of his magnetism remained, leaving others anxious only to propitiate him, and restore him to good spirits, like a truculent child.

He was already a great success in the world of temporary celebrities that has its brief successive hour in large cities like London or New York, and thereafter makes way for the next regiment. Though Adam had heard nothing of his fame, and Giles and Zacharias, too, inhabited other worlds, it was a fact he had become immediately and almost sensationally successful.

It was hard to say how much of this was due to his arresting personal quality and the arrogant certainty of his pretensions. His talent was a kind of glittering one, it was true; there was something ominous about the overflowing ease of it. He could draw in half a dozen ways, paint in as many methods. He had first attracted attention with some fine landscapes and individual portraits. Then he had quarrelled violently with his father over money, and promptly turned to commercial art with perfect indifference. Advertising contracts had poured in; he did nearly everything—satirical sketches for high-class weeklies, poster art, attenuated, stylized illustration in the magazines—all with the same glib facility. He insulted nearly everybody, yet attracted nearly everybody, and spoke his mind with the boldest disregard for the possibility of anyone's injuring him in turn; and as yet, certainly, no one had. In a city which contained within itself another city that was the greatest concentration of Jewish population in recorded time, he was anti-Semitic to the point of an obsession. He had designed a slip-jacket for a book by a highly popular Jewish woman novelist in which all the characters had Gentile names and were seemingly Gentiles. Julian's jacket presented them in atrocious caricatures of familiar Hebrew types. He still had it framed on the wall.

"It was what they were!" he exclaimed. "Hell, why didn't she dare say so, and call them Ginsberg and Moscovitz instead of Lattimer and Tremayne?"

But in the end nearly everyone in town quarrelled with him, or avoided him in frank detestation. His combination of niggardliness and personal extravagance was repellent.

He was without principles and without gratitude, and his demands were ceaseless. He was head over heels in debt, yet he spent money on himself wildly, and looked upon a bill as an affront. Nevertheless, the world was still large, and he found it was always easy to summon an entire new court and begin again the same rapidly run course of relationships in which everyone else always came out the loser. Nearly all those in the room now were acquaintances of only the last month or two; in a month or two more these would be gone, and others would have taken their places with only the faces and names seeming altered.

So it was he now looked forward to Adam's call with pleasure, for he could scarcely name any other old friend. What was he going to do with him since he himself was going on to the theatre? But Julian never troubled his head about such details. He wanted to see Adam for a moment very much, and any inconvenience that might result for Adam would not affect himself.

He went on working, he went on conveying to Elizabeth Conger his strong sense of desiring her under the miserable eyes of Helen Willoughby and the blind, conceited eyes of Elizabeth's husband. He heard his bell ring at last, shouted to the janitor to press his buzzer, and got up as Adam stepped, smiling and a little shy, into the crowded room.

Julian gave him a look of quick, critical, and shrewd survey, as if he did not intend to trouble himself about anything except surface impressions or physical characteristics. And Adam's face, his serious and innocent eyes, the earnest gropings that were discernible there, all filled him with amusement, just as these things had when they had first known each other on board the *K-13*.

He began to grin, and without even bothering to introduce Adam to anyone in the studio ,and addressing him as if they were quite alone, he cried out:

"So you're actually a reverend, a parson, a Holy Roller, or something! I didn't believe it when I first heard about it! Why, good God, you're not even an Episcopalian, are you?"

There was something too robust about the direct insults of Julian's tone and manner for Adam to take offence at them. There was plainly no personal malevolent intention in them, but only a large, general scorn that embraced everything and everyone.

So Adam smiled, and a little self-conscious at the eyes that had been lifted to stare at him curiously or dully from the various corners of the studio, murmured that he was a clergyman, yes, though not quite a Holy Roller.

"What's the difference? It's all the same!" Julian exclaimed, brushing aside the paltriness of such distinctions in his rapid contemptuous voice. He had forgotten about his poster now, forgotten his plans and his casual guests, excepting only Elizabeth Conger, perhaps. He was still aware of her there, and he knew only that he was not going to let her get away. He would have noticed the departure of no one else.

With the abrupt gesture that had the quality of a push he forced Adam into a chair, and drawing up another opposite him, continued to stare at him as if he were studying some species of insect.

"Now tell me," said Adam with uneasy heartiness, "what have you heard of Zack and Will? Do you ever run into either of them any more? I met Zack myself, you know, on a subway only this afternoon just after I got in."

Julian frowned impatiently. He was plainly not interested in the topic. "Oh, Zack!" he said with a bored harshness. "That pants-presser! What would I want to see him for? And Giles is in Boston—looked up the bastard once—he's doing all right—big practice and everything. Why, he's even got a swelled head! But the hell with them! I want to find out about you."

"Well," said Adam with a broader smile, "I came to New York today to see my baby—I've just had a baby—a boy."

But this information, so far from arresting Julian, seemed to interest him no more than some stereotyped remark about the weather.

"What I want to know is," he said in a loud aggressive voice, completely ignoring Adam's information, "what the hell it is you really do. Where do you live?"

"My church is in a little town up on Lake Ontario."

"Oh, my God!" Julian groaned. "What for?"

His voice, which had a persistent sound of attack in it, had caught the attention of the others. They sat up, watching as if at an unexpectedly provided show. They considered Adam with blunt wonder, having made out, at any rate, that he was certainly a minister, and being affected one way or another by this knowledge. The backgammon game had stopped; the bootlegger's runner took a drink furtively like a child sneaking a chocolate; and the two pretty showgirls with narrowed eyes examined Adam interestedly, as if wondering what kind of young man this was whose profession included difficulty of access, and whether he could be possibly different from other men. Helen Willoughby and Elizabeth Conger were staring, too, but with more of sympathy, or respect. For the intimations that Julian was about to bait him were obscurely divined, and they had all taken sides immediately.

But Adam was trying to dodge Julian's plain, crude determination to make a spectacle of him, and he said with unaltered friendliness:

"Never mind about me, Julian. Tell me about yourself. You're an artist, I see. I hope you'll let me have a look at your things while I'm here."

Julian brushed aside this offer, too, with a sweeping belittlement of Adam's tastes and opinions that asserted the unimportance of even making an impression on him.

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently again. "I'll show you sometime. Sure, I'm all right—don't worry! Now look: what do you think you're doing by preaching, anyway?"

Adam gave up trying to avoid battle. And though he still smiled, he began to feel resentful at this unprovoked immediate assault upon him and his sacred privacy.

"I don't know what puzzles you so much about it, Julian,"

he said. "You seem to have the idea that because I'm a minister, I'm automatically a crank."

"Sure, that's right," said Julian promptly. "You must be! And I want to find out how you got that way!"

Adam flushed. "Well, if I'm a crank, or if I'm even taking a chance on becoming one, every human being who has ever been any good at all has taken that same chance. I'm not speaking just about preachers, but about all kinds of people, poets and scientists and philosophers. The way you look at it, you'd have to say Plato was a crank, and John Bunyan, and Savonarola, and Pasteur, and everyone who ever admired noble things. And if thousands and thousands of others have simply tried to do as well but amounted to nothing and only turned into cracked eccentrics in the end, at least they did try to think, they did try to help other people. So isn't it better to take the chance of becoming one of them rather than just to be sure and safe and never reach for anything?"

His voice had grown higher, and he had been carried away and said more than he had intended. Julian saw he was annoyed, and a faint, delighted smile whipped across his face.

"Poor old Adam!" he said patronizingly. "You never had any brains, but I like you anyway."

He was just then aware of some intense quality in Elizabeth Conger's listening, and suddenly was filled with a desire to display his powers before her. In his instinct he made no concealments, but prepared to let himself go, making plain his brutality and his ruthlessness, and his indifference to anyone else's feelings, because these things paraded also a kind of sexual strength and the sort of vitality that often excited women even while it frightened them. His voice took on a savage tone. He laughed loudly, and dismissed Adam's nervous, half-propitiating defence with a gesture in which there was the pretence of an enormous disgust.

"You're right, I don't fall on my face in front of the

crowd you think were so hot!" he cried. "Who ever heard of half of them, anyway? And what do crackpots like you really accomplish? Hell, if you actually were philosophers, you wouldn't waste your time trying to tell other people how suffering can be avoided. You're all just a pack of fools in the end, see?"

"Then you don't believe anyone should ever have tried to make humanity happier?" asked Adam with a glint in his eyes, growing angrier still at Julian's triviality, his vast, shallow intolerance, and above all, his debased convictions that were set as hard as if in amber. He began to regret his impulse in coming here, and he asked himself how he could have forgotten what Julian was like, and what an evening with him was certain to prove.

"Happy!" Julian now repeated in a vituperative accent. "How are you going to do that, I'd like to know! Good God, you talk like a Y.M.C.A. secretary!"

He picked up the nearest drink and downed it, as if fortifying himself for a final rush of annihilation.

"Listen! Everybody gets what he wants—don't you know that by this time? Everybody! And they're sore—what you call unhappy—because they have to pay a price for it. Because they keep kidding themselves they really want something else. Most people think they want money, but they won't get up half an hour earlier to make it. So what they really want is laziness. Or else maybe to be thought pure and virtuous. Or maybe to avoid taking chances. But they get what they want every time, and brains and luck and influence have nothing to do with it, it's just wanting it that counts. Look at the dumbbells who make millions, and the little runts and hunchbacks who get the best-looking girls sometimes! Why? Just because they wanted them most. But they're all sore because they hate like hell to have to pay a price for anything—they wanted it for nothing, see? So don't talk to me about happiness and all that tripe, and being good to your neighbour, and saving your soul! Nobody gives a damn about saving his soul anyway, unless he thinks

he can trim someone else that way, and get the better of him. And don't try to tell me you're any different either!"

His energetic voice had surcharged his inconsistent outburst. He bore Adam down like the assault of some ton-heavy and formidable animal. It was the sound, the unsparing brutality behind his words, rather than any part of their meaning that crushed Adam; and seeing the effect he had made, seeing Adam's flushed, humiliated, speechless face, Julian at once relaxed with contentment. He was instantly bored with the seriousness of the entire conversation, and his restless mind took another abrupt direction.

"What are we talking like this for?" he exclaimed magnanimously, as if he himself were quite guiltless. His quick, perceptive eyes saw that Adam had every intention of leaving him, and he had a perverse longing not to have him go.

"Look here," he said with his warmest smile. "I've got lots to talk to you about—hell, I want to see you! But the Congers here and Helen and I are going on to a show. Come on along with us! We can get an extra ticket. Then afterward you and I will get together. Can't you do that?"

Now he was altogether winning. His irresistible smile filled his handsome face with an actual glow. He expressed no apology for his rough-shod behaviour, he had completely forgotten the pain he had caused, yet his face at the same time blandly admitted his own villainy, with a kind of humorous regret. He looked at Adam so intimately that it was as if no one else had ever understood him half so well, or had really so deep an affection for him.

And Adam, in spite of his boiling resentment, found himself helpless like nearly everyone else, and a smile that he was not prepared for stole across his own face. He looked at Julian as if grateful to him for consenting to be merely courteous. But the suggestion itself surprised him, and he said in a puzzled voice:

"But you can't be going to the theatre now! Not at this hour."

"Oh, we'll pick up the third act anyway," said Julian indifferently. "And we can hurry."

He cast an annoyed glance in the direction of his incompleting poster, and at once dismissed this distasteful thought from his mind. He began to hunt for a hat among the furniture. When he had unearthed one, he looked irritably at his incongruous guests.

"The rest of you better get out now!"

His voice was rude, full of undisciplined impatience. But the sallow musical-comedy librettist only said coolly:

"Oh, go to hell, Julian! Duffy and I want to have another game. He's just got into me for sixty dollars, and you don't think I'm going to let him get away with that, do you?"

Julian scowled. Then with deliberateness he went over and locked up the liquor cabinet, saying sulkily:

"Well, be sure you slam the door so that it locks when you go out. And don't stay here all night either! I'm not running a free hotel."

The other two men, the bootlegger and the janitor, obeyed, however, without protest. In the general confusion of departure, their own good-byes went unanswered and unnoticed. Julian glanced around for Helen, and saw her making her face up before a mirror.

"Hurry up," he shouted in a tone that was like a blow.

She turned and looked at him without answering, and then, dropping her eyes, began to put her things away in her bag. In a moment they were all on the street, and Julian was yelling for a cab. They piled into one that drew up with a screech. He began talking away again in his enthusiastic but joyless fashion the instant he had given the address. They all laughed, made similar sounds, and exhibited a noisy show of gaiety. Their eyes peered out into the night that moved past them in jerks and flutters of light. At the theatre, Adam, getting out first, settled for the cab. Then Julian, putting his hand in his pocket, said with a curse he didn't have a dime on him. So Helen bought his

ticket at the box office and the young Congers and Adam paid for themselves.

They entered the dark theatre just before the end of the second act. Their seats were bad, in nearly the last row, and they made so much noise getting into them that several people in front moved uncomfortably, or turned to send them rebuking glances. Presently Adam's eyes became accustomed to the gloom, and looking at the bright stage he made an effort to find out what was going on and what the story was about. He looked stupidly at one of the actors, and then saw it was John Barrymore himself, lithe, odd, distinguished, with something provocative even about his slightly nasal voice. How handsome he was! He, too, had nearly everything. But somehow, as he watched the artist, Adam felt obscurely troubled, almost depressed. He noticed Julian staring with his hard, unimpressed air. Then the curtain fell on the climax of the highly theatric Italian play to loud applause, and they all went out into the lobby again.

Here, too, Julian appeared to know a surprising number of people, not all of whom knew one another. But then he seemed to have the habit of treating the entire world as an assemblage of acquaintances, and made little distinction between people he had met and people he had not. He nodded, or waved casually half a dozen times, and in the street outside toward which the crowd, many in evening dress, pushed their way to chat and smoke a cigarette in the coolness, a couple of men approached to greet Julian. One was a stocky young man with the shapeless nose and battered ears of a prizefighter, while his companion, gotten up very elaborately with an effect of elegance, had, on the contrary, a suave, supercilious air. With a shock Adam then noticed that he was faintly rouged and that his eyes were made up.

But appearing utterly unabashed, Julian at once addressed him with his insulting candour.

"Hello, dear," he said to the rouged young man with a kind of affable mockery. "Got plenty of perfume behind your ears tonight? You're looking mighty sweet!"

To Adam's astonishment the rouged young man seemed to take not the slightest offence at this, only sending Adam himself a quick glance as if to see what his reaction was to this exposition. Adam was dashed still more at hearing him and Julian presently arrange for all of them to meet after the play at a café somewhere downtown called Satori's.

Then the bell rang, and they all trooped back to their seats. During the third act Julian was more restless than ever, and talked in a low but audible voice during most of the action of the melodrama, so that Adam could scarcely follow what was supposed to be taking place. He felt a little giddy, so strange was all this compared with the placidity of his life in Orion Mills. He was disturbed also, and wondered where they were to go next. But he was sustained by Julian's promise to see him after the party, and looked forward to a long talk with him alone later on.

At last the final curtain fell, Julian hurrying them all off in front of the rest of the audience, as if there were something important about getting out first, or some important thing they had to do. He captured another cab—Adam often remembered that evening as a succession of cabs whirring them off from one meaningless destination to another—and they drove down to Greenwich Village and a big Italian restaurant located on a street like a slum.

Inside, in the midst of garish decorations, an orchestra was playing dance music for a large crowd. A couple of tables were shoved together for their party by two perspiring waiters. And sure enough, the prizefighter and the rouged young man showed up a moment later and joined them. Adam examined the latter with alarm and indignation. He wondered if he ought not to warn the prizefighter about his companion. But how could he delicately insinuate such an abominable thing? And good heavens! Was it possible? Could it be that the prizefighter himself was just such another?

A round of drinks, served in thick, small, white china

cups, had now been rapidly downed, and another one ordered. Adam left his own sitting there untasted. He looked around him bewilderedly and saw that Julian was already dancing with Elizabeth Conger, his head held slightly on one side, his brilliant eyes fixed intently upon her face.

He turned back to his own table and considered these companions from whom he felt so desperately remote. Tom Conger was talking to the prizefighter and boasting foolishly about his knowledge of the ring. But Helen Willoughby was watching Julian. Then she picked up her drink and swallowed the doctored, imitation whiskey quickly.

Adam by this time had managed to discover from the general atmosphere the fact that she was Julian's girl, that she was actually living with him! He gazed at her covertly.

He was growing more and more miserable in this place. He hated the big restaurant with its shattering noise, the stupid laughter, the vacuous faces of the people everywhere who found pleasure in this and in no other way. And the dreadful, unrelieved hardness of the faces under the set smiles, the coldness and cruelty of all sensual living, with its sardonic affectations of good-fellowship and love, filled him with dire helplessness. He made up his mind to leave as soon as Julian returned to the table; there was no use waiting any more in the hope of seeing him alone. There was no use seeing him anyway! They had both changed since the war, even though he could not say how, and now they had nothing to say to each other.

Just then the orchestra ceased with a final crash, and Julian and Elizabeth picked their way back to their party. Some other acquaintances they had encountered were straggling along behind them. There were shouts of greeting, enthusiastic handshakes, bursts of delighted laughter.

Julian broke out at once with his usual irrelevance.

"Say, Adam," he cried, "I've just thought of something—what we were talking about before, you know." He uttered in a kind of aside to the rest of the party: "This guy's a minister—and my best friend." He swung back at Adam

again: "Now look! Did it ever occur to you that maybe God exists and at the same time doesn't even know of our existence? You see, He could have created the universe, and that in turn could have started a lot of things living without His knowing anything about it. What have you got to say to that?"

The rouged young man snickered delicately and lifted his cup with a disdainful air. Julian turned on him viciously.

"Listen, precious, you'll spoil your complexion if you keep late hours like this! In fact, you'd better get the hell out of here!"

For a moment it looked as if there were going to be a fight, but this was averted by Adam's saying hastily: "I think I myself will have to be going anyway."

But before he could push back his chair, Julian had caught his arm.

"Don't go!" he pleaded. "Hell, I don't mean to get your goat. No kidding, I want you to stay to do me a favour—it's important!"

Adam looked at him uncomfortably. He saw again Julian's smile, which in its unexpected entreaty was like the unbending of a tyrant. After a moment he sank back in his chair, and at the same time knew with a beaten feeling that he was lost, that now he would not be able to go until Julian himself released him.

But as if to be quit of surroundings that had projected various exasperations, Julian proposed at once that they all leave and go somewhere else uptown where it was quieter; and forgetting all about his previous declaration of having no money about him, or else indifferent to the disclosure that he had lied, he now produced a large roll of crumpled bills from a buttoned back pocket, and banged on the table for the waiter.

Adam saw that he had already drunk a good deal, but that a sort of painful excitement was keeping his wits intensively alive. Tom Conger, on the other hand, was developing a stupefied aspect, his lower lip was beginning

to sag, and his eyes beamed foolishly all about without resting on anything very long.

They escaped from the noise, the clatter of dishes and glassware, the sounds of muttered instructions and protest that passed constantly like an undercurrent between the waiters in their own tongue, and from the crowd of scented girls and greedy-looking men, and the evidence of the struggle everywhere to have a good time; and found themselves out in the unreal, drab sanity of the street. There was something patient and mournful in that waiting silence that asserted it alone would endure.

Another cab carried them rapidly uptown. Tom Conger swayed and lurched, obedient to its bouncings, his head dangling out of the window like a balloon on a string. Elizabeth sat with tense lips. Julian began to fondle Helen, keeping his eyes fixed on Elizabeth. But Helen all at once divined something of this. She drew away quickly and gazed through the window beside her.

The cab drew up on a street in the East Fifties. They stumbled out, and Julian led the way through an iron grating to a basement. He knocked, and a red-rimmed eye examined him through a sliding, barred wicket. There was a mumble of recognition, a lock clicked, and the party entered the speakeasy.

Adam had no idea that anything of the sort existed on so large a scale. The rooms were softly carpeted and furnished in oppressive plush. There were several small bars in various places, and here and there waiters were preparing game and luxuries in chafing dishes at the tables of customers. There were a number of bottles of champagne in buckets, and a dapper proprietor moved about accompanied by a thug in formal dress like an ape in a starched shirt. Everywhere under the subdued lights could be seen people in the various stages of alcoholic exultation or despair. In one corner a ruddy-faced man with a white moustache sat quietly weeping by himself. Girls with uneasy roving eyes, but inexpressibly haughty airs, many of them brilliantly and

expensively dressed, sat with dissipated-looking men. Nearly everybody present suggested riches coupled with sensuality and extravagance.

Julian selected the room he liked best, and ordered champagne. He touched his glass to Tom Conger's and said bullyingly:

"Come on, drink up, drink up! What are you holding out on the party for?"

Adam sipped some ginger ale. He began to solace himself with the thought that he was seeing life. He simply tried to store up his impressions like scratches on a blank piece of paper to examine and understand later. Just then, some of Julian's inevitable acquaintances paraded past and recognized him. They were a middle-aged, almost old couple, with that discontented, petulant look that is fixed so often on the faces of those who have spent an entire lifetime in the quest of pleasure. They had an air of third-rate society, of people used to much travel, large hotels, and feverish aimlessness. With them was a thick-set man with pronounced Jewish features who appeared at once sleepy and alert like a confident cat. He was smoking a large cigar.

The elderly couple pounced on Julian with exclamations, as if they sought to escape from their own dreariness, and refresh themselves with his vital youthfulness. They seemed to know him well, but their companion was evidently a stranger. They introduced him as Mr. Tannen.

They promptly sat down and joined the younger party, and except for Mr. Tannen, with his slow smile, began clacking away at once.

"Be careful what you say to me, Ada," Julian mockingly warned the middle-aged woman, whose face on closer view had a smooth, calcimined appearance. "I've got a minister here with me tonight. I brought him along purposely to take care of my morals."

The middle-aged woman with the chalky, pinkish face turned a pair of glittering, avid eyes on Adam. Some diamond bracelets clattered on her arm.

"Oh, how sweet!" she exclaimed. "I just adore ministers. I always told Jack the only man I'd ever be untrue to him with was a minister."

"Or a bellhop, or a nigger, or a doorknob," said Jack scornfully. They all laughed, including Ada. She began to powder her nose with a look of satisfaction.

The waiter returned and presented a menu. Julian glanced over it, and uttered a sound of indignation!

"Christ, what prices! What a lousy, Jew clip-joint this is!"

Adam nudged Julian furtively, and looking up with his arrogant and belligerent stare, Julian met the calm, speculative eyes of Mr. Tannen. "I said this was a lousy Jew clip-joint," he repeated insolently.

"Well, they're certainly clipping you," said Mr. Tannen equably.

Julian looked him over more carefully. He saw he was facing a tough and competent antagonist. Mr. Tannen was obviously a man of no education, but he had the air of powerful assurance belonging to someone who could give as much as he got. Julian forgot about everyone else; even the thought of Elizabeth vanished in his volatile, erratic temper.

"Maybe you're one of the owners of this dive," he said with a sneer. "You sound like it!"

Mr. Tannen rolled his cigar between his teeth, removed it, and blew out a puff lovingly. He refused to be drawn into a denial of Julian's foolish accusation.

"Kinda anti-Semitic, ain't you?" he asked, keeping a genial face.

"That's right," said Julian. "And so is everyone else here, only *they* haven't got the guts to admit it. But I don't suppose you know that."

"Sure, I know it," said Mr. Tannen in the same controlled way. "That's what keeps us good, see, and makes us smarter than you. Don't stop!—because if you ever was to do that, maybe Jews would forget, and get lazy, and then be as stupid as you. And now let me buy you a drink."

Mr. Tannen leaned back with the assumption of someone who had won and who was too contemptuous of his opponent not to be magnanimous.

But Julian could not take defeat like this, and he felt all their eyes expectantly upon him.

"Wait a minute!" he burst out. "You kikes have managed to make out that anti-Semitism is a crime. What about anti-Gentilism? I suppose that's O.K.?"

"Oh, you're drunk," said Mr. Tannen disgustedly. "Just a young drunk—a dope—throwing his old man's money around."

Julian was so startled by an attack of exactly his own kind that he bewilderedly found himself on the defensive.

"Like hell I am!" he cried childishly. "I'm paying my own way, and I can make a damn sight more than any ostrich salesman that ever lived!"

"What do you do?" said Mr. Tannen idly.

"I'm an artist."

Mr. Tannen looked at him indulgently. "I bet you get fifty dollars a picture sometimes, huh?" he said with mock respect.

A gust of rage passed over Julian.

"Listen, Ikey, I'm a hell of an artist, see! I can do anything. And you oughtn't to talk about things you don't know anything about. I know you're thick, but what do you want to make a show of it for?"

"My name's Jake, dope," said Mr. Tannen with heavy calm.

Julian eyed the fleshy nose opposite him with a kind of rapt expression. He had just decided to end this mutual interchange of insults by punching Mr. Tannen on it, when his anger, without the least warning or any clear reason, suddenly went out of him like water bursting from a bag. What was he going to fight this Jew for, anyway? By God, he rather liked him! He had guts, and there was a knowing wisdom in the fleshy mouth and the indifferent, watchful eye.

"All right, Jake!" he cried heartily. A wild impulse darted across his brain and he acted upon it as if there were no considering space at all between inception and execution. "Say, how would you like to learn something? Maybe afterward you won't make such an ass of yourself in public. A free lesson I'll give you," and Julian mimicked him outrageously, but good-naturedly, "not costing noddings, see? Ever hear of the Delamater collection? Would you like to see the best modern paintings in America, with me to tell you why they're the best? Well, that's where we're going right now!"

Mr. Tannen considered him skeptically. "Delamater?" he said slowly. "Is it that feller from Wall Street, you mean, with the big house on Fifth Avenue? Sure, that's a smart idea from a crazy drunk like you! Just go and ring the bell, huh, at this time of night, and say you come to look at his pitchers!"

"For God's sake!" said Julian disgustedly, "the Delamaters are friends of mine. Do you think I'm kidding you or anything?"

Jake Tannen was eyeing him with more interest. "Maybe you're only a fourflusher," he said lazily, "but anyhow I'll take a chance."

The painful restlessness, which was not restricted to Julian alone, had all the others agreeable to a suggestion about which nothing was plain except that it required hectic movement and that there seemed to be something flatteringly unusual about such conduct.

Adam was now in that state of peculiar will-lessness in which he was carried along like a dull, oppressed spectator of his own folly, wholly unable to offer any resistance to it in the strange senseless necessity for merely completing a design.

He found himself getting up with the babble of the rest crashing all around him. On the street the enlarged party embarked this time in two cabs. After an interval in the dark night they were all tumbling out in front of a huge

stone house as sepulchral and pretentious as a temple. Green boards were affixed before the plate-glass windows. The house was plainly shut up.

Julian with an irritable exclamation said that the Delamaters must be up in Bar Harbour still. But no matter, they would get in somehow; there must be some watchman or caretaker about. And he led them all with abruptness toward some tall gates at one side, and shook these and banged upon them as if there were something admirable about making such an uproar at such an hour. After a while a light showed from the wing of the house, and presently a middle-aged man in a collarless shirt, and trousers with dangling suspenders, same shuffling out toward them.

Adam heard Julian's rapid, demanding and confident voice without hearing much of what he said. But since he was no longer surprised at anything that was happening this evening, he did not find it particularly astonishing when the gates were actually unlocked and the watchman, apparently recognizing Julian, or remembering his name, let them all in and sulkily opened the marble wing in which the picture gallery was housed.

"Julian, you're a scream!" Ada exclaimed. "Honestly, this is the most ridiculous thing!"

She appealed to everybody with outstretched hands.

Mr. Tannen had been hanging back somewhat discreetly, but he now appeared to make up his mind that this expedition was going to be safe. He looked around him with the greatest interest at the paintings along the walls of the costly, private gallery. These quivered with many colours under their careful lighting, and they were of such diverse character as to create a kind of confusion like any surfeit.

Adam like all the rest trooped obediently after Julian, with the uneasy watchman bringing up the rear. Julian at once began to expound the virtues and the defects of the various canvases. In each case he pronounced them as either execrable or magnificent, but never anything less. Indeed, he was now having a fine time. He talked for himself alone,

and talked well. There was no doubt that Julian, for all his prejudices, knew precisely what he was talking about; and only Jake Tannen attempted to make the least answer to his sweeping affirmations, merely out of a determination to take the opposite side. Adam saw, however, that there was no actual hostility in these rebuttals, that on the contrary Mr. Tannen had evidently begun to respect Julian.

And when they had nearly completed their brief tour, the watchman, mumbling uneasily that maybe, please, they would go now, for the Delamaters wouldn't like this if they ever heard about it, happened to address Julian by name, and Mr. Tannen turned with a start of surprise.

"Gamble!" he exclaimed. "Is your name Gamble? Are you W. J. Gamble's son, maybe?"

When he learned that this was so, Mr. Tannen's capitulation became complete. Now, even the opposition disappeared in him. To Julian's next vituperative outburst at a painting of the post-impressionist school he only said meekly:

"Well, if you say so, O.K. by me. Sure, I guess you know your onions all right."

And the collapse of Mr. Tannen, more than anything else, brought to an end the nonsensical expedition.

"I've had enough of this!" Julian himself cried. "Let's get out of here. I want a drink—a lot of drinks! Come on!"

"Let's go up to Harlem," said Tom Conger, as if relieved that the educational tour was over. His voice was thick. "I know a joint—The Promised Land Club—swell joint." His voice was thick, and he swayed and clawed at Adam for support. Julian looked at Conger contemptuously and then nodded. "All right—Harlem. We'll go to Harlem."

But Ada and Jack demurred, explaining they had been dancing all evening and were all in, and when they went outside to where the two cabs were still waiting, the party split in two, Mr. Tannen, somewhat regretfully it seemed, going off in one direction with his friends, and Julian and Adam, the Congers, and Helen Willoughby, speeding up-town in the opposite.

They arrived at last at the small Negro night club, and Adam found himself in one more haunt avowed to pleasure, that succeeded only in distilling sombreness. The room was long and narrow, with a small bar in one corner. An orgiastic orchestra, shining with sweat, was going at full blast in another. Young Negresses were here and there dancing with white men, one Negro with a white woman. Nearly everyone was drunk, or partially so; and there was a kind of horrible mixture of vapidty and lunacy on half the faces of the revellers.

Julian had a double-sized drink of abominable gin, which made even him shudder and gag. He puffed vigorously at a cigarette and glanced over searchingly at Tom Conger.

It was not necessary now for him to push Conger to drink himself into witlessness. He was constantly bickering in a petty way with his wife, repeating everything over and over exasperatingly.

Elizabeth had drawn away from him as far as possible. It was no longer easy for her to disguise the detestation she clearly felt.

Julian was alive to what was going on. He now suggested to Elizabeth in a low voice that the best thing to do would be to take Tom to a hotel and put him to bed. In any case, it was too late for them to try to reach their suburb. She nodded.

Julian got up, and by a mixture of cajolery and anger, got Tom up, too. He led him lurching to the door. There was a cab still on the street. Julian pushed Tom inside and turned to block Elizabeth's way. He held out his hand, and as she unthinkingly took it, her fingers closed over something small, cold and metallic.

It was the key to his apartment. Her eyes met his quietly. She looked down again, dropped the key into her handbag, and got into the cab without a word. Julian stood on the street for a moment, watching it disappear around the corner, the smile on his face deepening and deepening.

He squared his shoulders then and returned to his com-

panions. With a scowl he now remembered that Helen Willoughby was there, and that she must be disposed of somehow. There would be a scene, and in his annoyance he resolved to make it as ugly as possible. As for the pretext, that did not matter. But as he grimly pushed on toward his own table, he saw a pretext ready made which struck him as inexpressibly comic.

Although Helen Willoughby had been drinking hard all evening, almost as hard as Tom Conger, she had not been affected by it like him. The raw bootleg whiskey seemed only to have intensified her pain. A self-destructive light had become fixed in her eyes with excessive brightness together with a suggestion of something determinedly vicious that was staringly in contrast with her delicacy.

Left alone with Adam, the wretched girl had all at once followed some unconsidered impulse to win him. As Julian now paused, he saw her leaning toward Adam with her mouth parted, her eyes set in a glittering stare, and her attitude one of such blunt invitation as to be more repellent than seductive.

Julian advanced upon them quickly. It was not in the least difficult to make a show of the rage of a deceived lover, for though he did not want her any more, and was only concerned about how to get rid of her, he resented her perverse desire for betrayal just as much as if it were sincere.

From his mouth there came a sound that could be heard above the sweating Negro orchestra, and sent the club bouncer spinning around and peering toward the table.

"Get out of here! Get the hell out of here, you lousy tramp!"

Helen quivered. She passed her hand over her eyes and through her disordered hair. Her face asked pitifully for mercy. But Julian repeated his outcry, and her eyes dropped. She allowed herself the luxury of a swift, final look that reported all her comprehension of him, down to the last detail. Then she got up, leaving Adam stupefied there, and began to walk hesitantly toward the door, stopping now and

then as if considering, in a puzzled way that grotesquely suggested the walk of an injured fly.

Adam turned his own gaze on Julian.

"Why did you do that?" he demanded.

Julian said pleasantly: "You didn't suppose I wanted the two of them to show up in my flat tonight!"

"The two of them?" Adam repeated.

Julian took a drink with an air of relish. "Sure, I just managed to slip my key to the other one—Conger's wife. She took it all right!"

Adam understood. His face darkened.

"I wonder if you have any idea what you're like? You're not even a human being—I think you must be a kind of monster."

Julian threw his head back. He laughed. He laughed deeply and genuinely until the tears rolled down his face.

And this laughter seemed to admit with indifference, perhaps with complacency, Adam's angry charge, making no bones about it in a way that was itself an added horror. Adam stared at him with a feeling of dismal inadequacy as though he had been attacking an avalanche. He saw Julian reach over and slap him on the back, yet scarcely felt the contemptuously affectionate blow. Dimly he heard him say between his guffaws:

"Good old Adam! Best fun I've had in a month. Don't upset yourself over just a couple of pushovers! Hell, they like to be treated that way!"

Adam had no answer to make. He said miserably to himself that probably Julian was a genius, that was it; for that was what geniuses were like.

Just then he saw someone had come up and was standing over their table. Looking up, he beheld the cigar, the bland, watchful features, and the heavy-lidded eyes of Mr. Jake Tannen.

"So here you are," said Mr. Tannen with a sigh. "Had quite a time finding you!" He dropped uninvited into a chair. "Where are the girls? Gone? Well, that's all right.

Because I want to see you, Gamble; I got a business proposition to make—that's what I come uptown to find you for."

Julian looked at him cynically. His mood veered again. "That's great!" he exclaimed sardonically. "Just tell me how much you want me to invest. Don't even tell me what it is, not a sucker like me!"

"You don't get me," said Mr. Tannen heavily. "I don't want no money from you. I want to give you some money. You don't know who I am, maybe."

With much deliberation, he took a card from a large billfold and laid it face down in front of Julian. Adam, too, read it. Under Mr. Tannen's name, it bore the name of one of the big Hollywood producing companies.

"How would you like to be an art director on our lot?" asked Mr. Tannen.

Julian looked at him quickly. His face became all at once interested. Mr. Tannen was astutely watching.

"What's the proposition?" said Julian sharply.

Mr. Tannen looked around and frowned.

"Let's get out of here—some place where it's quiet so we can talk."

"O.K.," said Julian. "I could stand some breakfast, too—some scrambled eggs."

"I got an idea," said Mr. Tannen. "I'll take you where we can get some real food. Joy Forrest's flat—we'll wake up her—you know who's keeping her, of course? But he's away in Europe now. Sure, that's where I'll take you."

Julian appeared to be pleased by this suggestion. He shoved the check over to Tannen.

"Since you want to give me some money, how'd you like to take care of this as a starter?"

Mr. Tannen was unperturbed. "Anything you say. It's all on the expence account anyhow." He looked over at Adam with a wondering air, but Julian said quickly:

"He's coming with us."

"Why should I?" said Adam fiercely. "Haven't I seen enough?"

"Be good," Julian pleaded, gripping his arm. "Be a good sport! Hell, I don't know when I'll see you again, Adam. We'll just have breakfast together and then I'll let you go. Honest, I swear I will!"

Adam looked around almost as if searching for a rescuer. But he could not tear his arm away from Julian's grip and did not know how to escape.

He found himself presently in still another cab, bound for still another degrading destination.

On the way Mr. Tannen regaled them with appreciative accounts of their prospective hostess. "She's got a dog now," he said, "a little fancy dog, and on his collar there is a powder compact, a regular powder compact, only it's got flea powder inside! Clever, huh? And last Christmas when the big shot—the old man; you know who I mean—was here she got him to give her a little Christmas tree, about so high, but instead of ten-cent store things on it, what do you think she got the sap to do? She got him to hang it with real jewels, yeah, diamonds and everything!"

Mr. Tannen chuckled tenderly.

Adam made no sound, and his face remained blank. Then after an interval he discovered himself, as if in a forlorn dream that would not end, in the Fifties, next in a hallway where Mr. Tannen rang long and deliberately, and so at last inside a small, flashily luxurious flat, with satin everywhere, and a smell of perfume everywhere, and a blonde with sleepy, smiling eyes facing them in a hastily-fastened dressing gown of cerise and black.

But she made no protest at the call or its purpose, seeming to treat Mr. Tannen with the greatest good nature, and saying that her maid was still asleep but that she herself would cook them a breakfast. She left them alone with a couple of decanters handy.

Adam listened while the discussion between Julian and Mr. Tannen cautiously got under way. Soon it took on the

quality of a rowdy, insulting argument, full of scorn, abuse and indignant laughter. But it was plain that Julian was interested. Then Mr. Tannen said that Julian would be expected to leave almost immediately if he agreed, to take the Twentieth Century for Chicago this very afternoon.

And the wildness, the hysterical shiftings and instabilities of Julian's life, in which the most momentous events happened with maniacal speed, and continually darted off upon new, unexpected courses filled Adam with a peculiar envy. How drab his own steady way of life seemed by contrast, how trivial all his problems that had struck him as so solemn and so portentous! And yet—and yet there was something meaningless about Julian's helter-skelter impulses and unaimed rushings, like the galvanized twitching of a corpse. Looking at Julian grimly now, no longer as an old friend, he was filled with the conviction that all this exuberance was in the end about nothing. Or, perhaps, all such manifestations in Julian, and in others like him, were no more than attempts to escape from inner death.

Joy Forrest came back into the room with a tray. She had also had time to repair her make-up and arrange her hair a little. She was very beautiful, yet looked as though her beauty had been turned out by a machine. Julian gazed at her intently, smiling with his flushed, handsome face, upon which dissipation had set a knowing look, but no ravaged signs as yet. She gave him a faint, answering smile.

"Come over and feed me," said Julian abruptly. "I've got to talk Jewish to Abie here, so I need both hands to wave them."

She laughed, and sitting down beside him, held out a forkful of eggs toward his mouth.

Mr. Tannen went on with his argument, as though seeming impressed by Julian's hanging back yet being perfectly sure of him in the end. His voice at times was wheedling, at times outraged with pretended shock. Adam heard fantastic sums mentioned casually by these two who dealt only with such sums and were irritated, as if humiliated,

by having to do with lesser ones. Then he noticed Julian's arm around Joy Forrest's waist, but he was too exhausted to react one way or another to anything any longer.

Julian himself was now stimulated by the pursuit of two aims at the same time, arguing with Jake Tannen, and presenting himself as a lover to Joy Forrest; and in both he saw, with his undashed arrogance, that he was having full success.

The woman appealed to him by her hints of sensuous excessiveness, whether real or artificial, and her good-humoured, wise look made him remember Elizabeth Conger almost distastefully. What did he want that little suburban mouse for? Simply because she set so high a value on herself, was that it? And to become involved with her would mean endless complications, complications probably with that fool of a husband of hers for one thing, and even more complications with Elizabeth herself. She was certainly in his apartment now; she was waiting for him; she was waiting in the belief that she was doing a big, an appalling thing. The picture of her there suddenly drew a short burst of laughter from him which he did not bother to explain to anyone. Why not leave her there, just simply not show up? He would not have to go back until later in the day to get some clothes and pack a bag, and she would be gone long before that! Meanwhile here was Joy Forrest, so utterly without complications, and so frankly an adept at pleasure. He made up his mind simultaneously upon the two matters which filled it.

"O.K., Jake," he suddenly shouted to Mr. Tannen's last remark. "It's a deal!"

Mr. Tannen sighed again. He got up. Julian said casually: "I'm going to stay a little while. You boys just run along."

Mr. Tannen's face expressed nothing. Adam rose with a shudder. He was free, the evening was over! He said good-bye, and his listless ears did not even catch Julian's answer. He went out with Mr. Tannen without looking behind him. On the street, Mr. Tannen said good-night

indifferently, and Adam walked in the thinning dark to the nearest subway.

When he got out in Brooklyn, the dawn was already beginning. There was a foul taste in his mouth. He had a feeling of degradation. Though he was not even sleepy, he wanted oblivion to blot out the hideous world. He climbed the steps and set his key in the lock. All the memories of the night whirled about in his head like coloured balloons. He tried to stop thinking of any of them.

Suddenly he remembered how not so long ago he and Giles and Zacharias and Julian had all arranged to meet again a long time afterward; a long time—twenty years. Part of that time was already gone, but now Adam remembered that old pledge with bitterness, for he was certain it would not be kept; he was certain he would not see Julian Gamble ever again.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

NOT LONG AFTER Julian Gamble's malignant and destructive visit to him, and during that era when Adam was gaining his first, startled perceptions of reality in Orion Mills, Will Giles received the money for his last equity in the Vermont house and set about in grim earnest to make a go of his career this time.

The unexpected landfall had at once restored that optimism which even the ceaseless repetition of disasters had never been able to overcome. He had no idea who the mysterious purchaser was, and had the strangest indifference to finding out, almost as if he were anxious not to know. But he was now eager to get his hands on the money itself.

In due course he signed agreements, making over the property to a lawyer he had never heard of on behalf of the unnamed client to whom it was to be transferred. He went home with the certified check in his billfold, and now and then on the way took it out and looked at it tenderly,

and now and then felt his pocket nervously to see if it were still there.

It was an indescribable relief to pay off trifling debts and larger ones with an easy wave; it gave him a numbed, delicious feeling like an anaesthetic filtering through an area of pain. With the sigh of a grateful convalescent he settled with his landlord, and even paid up in advance for several months to come.

Soon the office was filled with devices in gleaming chromium and snowy enamel, with various, dubiously useful but highly impressive radiation appliances, electrical wave transmitters, and much complex testing apparatus, so that it began to suggest the workshop of some preposterously erudite scientist and devil's disciple in a motion-picture fantasy.

George Galbraith, back from one of his monotonous Caribbean cruises, viewed these acquisitions with a frown; he had not much to say on the subject, and Giles at once solaced himself with the universal explanation of most disapproval: it was a simple matter of jealousy. But Mrs. Giles' chirrupings in spite of their alarmed sound, and Miss Bass's reverent clasped hands before these wonders, more than made up for Galbraith's disagreeable want of enthusiasm.

Giles had become used to the constant company of Miss Bass now: she had attained the powerful if dull relationship of a habit. He did not really like her much, but he would certainly have missed her. And without knowing when or how it had come about, it seemed to have been settled between them that eventually, when some pleasantly vague goal mark or other had been passed, they would marry. Miss Bass had grown more peaceful at this prospect, and Giles had grown more reliant upon the prompt certainty of her approval of whatever he projected and the singleness of her voracious loyalty. She encouraged him to be egotistic, and dimly he perceived that the one use she wanted of him was that he should make the utmost use of her.

And now, indeed, everything seemed for a space to be

travelling smoothly and surely toward ease, toward harmony, as if all the bad times were over at last. Will resolved to rescue his mother and himself as soon as possible from the disgraceful tenement in which they hid; and he was sure it would not be long.

For a trickle of patients had begun finally to appear in the handsome office with some regularity, and to recommend him in turn to still others. But the strange, the disturbing, thing was that they all seemed to be of the same general type, were frequently odd without being interesting, and invariably poor. One of them was, actually, a Chinese laundryman; another, a stout German houseworker who claimed in broken English that she saw visions and wished to be cured of this malady; and any number of other baffled and handicapped people.

Giles had a remarkable touch with these poor patients, the mysterious touch of a true healer. It was only with the others, whom he now and then encountered, the capable and assured, the able and well-to-do, that he was at his worst. With these, often as not, he assumed an unconsciously defiant attitude, never failing to inform them that he himself had begun life as a newsboy and defending himself so violently against accusations they had not even uttered as to alienate them in a single visit.

He scornfully assured himself he did not care, and he had certainly many flattering proofs of his skill with people who unfortunately could not pay his bills or advance him in the world in any way at all. He was gentler than any woman with them, and his aspect of simple goodness, almost of saintliness, became more and more pronounced.

Then all at once with a kind of shock, as though it had stolen upon him with the most cynical guile, he awakened to the fact that he was once again desperately worrying, waking up often with a groan at night, and walking rapidly homeward each evening as though running from some invisible flock of harpies.

When had it happened, how had it come about, how long

had it been going on, he dismally asked himself like someone rudely aroused from a profound delusion of well-being. For he had unconsciously started to practise his miserable, familiar and futile economies some time previously, he now realized, going often without needed food, while his mother's enormous brightness of manner, the hysterical acceleration of the jokes with which she bombarded him, had kept an exact pace with his mounting distress.

His rent was once more overdue; and this was augmented by the fact that the most alarming sums were now also due on his equipment, which as yet had mysteriously failed to pay for itself after all. All sorts of harrowing, trifling obligations had also accumulated, and would not let him rest.

He was beginning to look ill again; as he came down the street, in clothes growing a little shiny, with an expression that was worn and hopeless, it was easy for the last observant passer-by to perceive that he had already the first signs of a beaten man.

Even Miss Bass appeared to grow worried about him. And one week, as the Summer advanced, she asserted that a brief trip might do him good—it would be a change, at least—and suggested that they spend a week-end at the home of some friends of hers of whom she was always talking, Mr. and Mrs. Maynard Spike.

Giles agreed with the listless air of someone who did not really much care what he did. He had been told often how interesting Maynard Spike was, and how interesting a woman his wife was. Mr. Spike was a sculptor, an inventor, and half a dozen other things besides, a most original man. He and his wife had built their own house, practically with their own hands, not a dozen miles inland from the narrow strip of New Hampshire seacoast. It would refresh Will to meet unusual, liberated people like that. So letters were exchanged, and it was promptly arranged that Will and Miss Bass were to pay their visit the following Saturday.

But on that Friday evening, George Galbraith unexpectedly turned up in port. He went at once to the tenement,

and when Giles came home that night he found Galbraith and his mother engaged in some intense, private conference. It was not hard to make this out from the constraint which they displayed in their faces and the guilty heartiness of their greeting.

They had dinner once more together, Galbraith taking them off to one of his restaurants and insisting on too large a meal. Though Galbraith carefully avoided any mention of what clouded all their minds, Giles knew it was in the air and could feel it coming. And sure enough afterward, over a good deal of coffee, and managing to blend considerable tact with a contrasting dramatic overemphasis, Galbraith plumbed for the facts, and insistently demanded from Giles an accounting of the difficulties written so plainly on his face.

At first reluctantly, then with a kind of perverse pleasure at letting himself go, Giles itemized all his troubles, his debts, and tried to remember still others to add to them. But he looked happier; he smiled as if a load were off his mind; he even laughed at Galbraith's gloomy expression, and at his mother's uncontrolled quiverings that passed over her like waves.

Galbraith had been smoking a cigar with a furious air. He paused to examine this as if with the greatest curiosity before he spoke. Then in the voice of an attacker, he told Giles there was now only one course open to him: he must allow all his grand equipment to be repossessed, he must secure a release from his oppressive office, he must give up for a time at least the pretence of private practice and secure institutional work with a set salary—any kind of institutional work that could be secured.

This violent advice had also a healthy sanity; it promised peace, and a relief from cares that were clearly bound otherwise to grow worse. Giles looked at Galbraith in astonishment, for he had long since in his simplicity set down the ship's doctor as merely an agreeable eccentric, and thoroughly unpractical for all his bombastic self-

assurance. He was grateful also; and a feeling of warmth and security came over him, now that he had been forced to face the worst, and perceived that its greatest terrors were not so bad after all.

But in spite of his secret delight at the thought of getting rid of all his worries at one stroke, his vanity would not allow him to capitulate immediately, since the suggestion had come to him from outside. He said with a serious air that he would think it over, he would give it every consideration, and tell Galbraith his decision when he returned from a week-end with Miss Bass.

Galbraith emitted a sound of robust scorn.

"What are you going away for at a time like this?" he demanded. "Good God, I should think you'd have enough to do without that——"

He broke off suddenly, as if checking himself from a regrettable candour. Giles knew by this time that Galbraith had a poor estimation of Miss Bass, though they had met on only two occasions and then briefly. And Miss Bass had been so humble with Galbraith, so respectful of her suitor's closest friend! It was too bad that Galbraith should be so intolerant; yet even as Will rebuked him loftily in his own mind, he was curiously pleased that Galbraith should feel like that.

The restaurant lights were dimming. Giles, as if conferring a favour, agreed to the suggestion of a deep discussion on Monday when he returned, since Galbraith had to sail on Tuesday again. The comforting assumption that Galbraith's advice would be taken was in the air, as was also the indication that Galbraith would stand by to lend a hand for moral support as well as arrangement of details.

Was it this very assumption that so augmented Will's obstinate denial of his own inadequacy? For the very next morning, after meeting Emma Bass at the North Station, his emotions about Galbraith's rescuing friendship underwent the most contradictory change. Bit by bit the gratitude oozed out of him and he was inflated instead with a

steadily climbing resentment. He was scarcely able to speak to Miss Bass on the short trip up, so filled were his thoughts with contemptuous repudiations of Galbraith's solution to his difficulties. For this clearly belittled him, and it was aggravated, moreover, by his mother's tremulous agreement with it. Who was Galbraith anyway? A paltry ship's doctor on an utterly obscure line, a man who had failed through his own eccentric absurdity, and had now come down in the world with a thump. He wanted to drag Giles down there with him, that was what he wanted!

Miss Bass opened her mouth to make a comment on some scenery they were passing, and received so curt a reply that she shrank back to the protection of her magazine. She looked at once repellent and touching, as she sat there in her toneless, drearily neat clothes, with her eyes shining as with sickness in her bloodless face.

What could be the matter with Will? she desperately wondered. What had happened? Had she herself done anything? Without reading a word, she revolved her hopeless speculations. Oh, if she only knew what to do, how to comfort him, how to alter his mood, how, above all, to feel in herself the power of a woman! Would it help any if she were to become cross, too? Her indecisive thoughts, at once feeble and unscrupulous, followed each other across a mind in which sentimentality had its invariable accompaniment of rapacity.

The brief journey, vibrating with Giles' secret bitterness and Miss Bass's frustrated longing to be important, went by in a blur; and all at once they were there.

Getting out on the platform, Miss Bass peered about near-sightedly for her friends, but could find no trace of them.

It was not until she had said in a complaining voice for the fourth time in twenty minutes: "But I just don't understand. They really ought to be here!" that she was able to add excitedly: "There's Maynard now—I knew he'd come!"

A very old and dirty-looking car, that had a tattered

appearance as though it were made entirely of rags, came hissing and fuming up the station drive. A short, slight man with bold, almost black eyes, and a military moustache that dwarfed still more an unfortunately tiny nose and mouth, sent Miss Bass a kind of glare of recognition.

"Absolutely disgusting!" he exclaimed without prelude. "An insult to the public, that's what it is—issuing a timetable and then not giving any notice whatsoever when it is out of date! The railroads in this country are the worst managed in the civilized world! I've said as much for years, and now I wash my hands of them!"

During this outburst, uttered with a mixture of pomposity and irascibility, Maynard Spike had shaken hands sourly with Giles without even looking at him. But his display of bad manners and worse temper, that might have affronted most persons, had a singularly soothing effect on Giles. That delicate body of senses that had been trained solely to detect the only fact that mattered to him now reported that Mr. Spike, for all his lordly manner and contemptuous glancings, was an inferior man, almost a misfit. And as Miss Bass anxiously watched, she saw a gentle smile cross Will's face. She relaxed with a sigh.

They drove inland in the patched and rickety car a distance of some ten miles. On the way Mr. Spike talked steadily, taking up one unrelated subject the moment he had explosively put the previous one in its place. He gave his views on everything with an altogether threatening air, and whenever answered, paid no attention to whatever was said, as if he were far too busy and important a man for that. Will's replies became more and more placating in tone, as his own self-esteem rose in gentle accord with his increasing show of benevolence and humility.

Mr. Spike's home, he had learned, was called The Bastion, and this pretentious designation made all the more shocking the dismal huddle of irregular stones before which they at last drew up on the summit of a windy hill. From the small, irregular, and uncomfortable-looking building, Mrs. Spike

advanced to meet them, with two small, grubby-faced boys peeping behind her skirts. She was tall and on first glance appeared quite good-looking until a second glance noticed some peculiar inconsistency in her features that destroyed the whole effect. Her large eyes were set too closely together, perhaps, and her skin, in spite of its luscious colour, had a kind of coarseness of texture like ordinary skin viewed microscopically. Her manner, though not at all truculent, was as superior as her husband's. She smoothed out a dress of some pale gold colour that was badly in need of cleaning, as though calling attention to the masses of her impressive sculptural figure, and in bell-like tones bade Giles welcome to The Bastion.

Giles was utterly at his ease now. His politeness carried a kind of tenderness with it. He longed only to agree, to agree fervently and immediately with whatever was said to him. The Spikes paraded the principal features of their retreat before him with ineffable pride: the gloomy-looking fireplace they had built themselves out of discarded and broken brick, the improvised shower produced by inverting a bucket with a pull rope, and a number of other rude devices that seemed like parodies of the conveniences of life, or else like so many self-directed jeers.

Some daubed paintings, mostly unfinished, were stacked along the wall in one place, an incompleted poem protruded like the tongue of an imbecile from a typewriter, various mangy-looking flower plants reared themselves out of a cluster of tomato cans, a number of sawed-off barrels had been shaped into seats, and at intervals around the room could be seen various highly impressionistic pieces of sculpture, which suggested that the sculptor had not so much rebelled against stultifying conventional forms, as thrown up his hands in despair at any hope of imitating them.

Now Mrs. Spike produced some homemade wine that had an indescribably musty taste and smell, and began a murmuring discourse upon the lost art of home vintages in so elaborate a way that Will looked at his glass in surprise

and tasted it over again immediately in the impression he had made a mistake. He said hastily it was delicious, and then set it down at a safe distance away.

Miss Bass was clearly enraptured by everything, and now and then squealed, "Oh, Daphne!" or "No, Daphne!" in a kind of excitement that was essentially female. Will wondered where on earth she had ever picked up two such strange friends as these, and presently it transpired that the acquaintanceship had begun in Emma's library where the Spikes had come for some kind of research or other; she had been especially helpful and impressed and in due course had been invited out to The Bastion for a week-end. She now had the air of invisibly nudging Will every minute or so to point out to him how startlingly original the Spikes were, and in what an interesting way they lived.

They were certainly "different." An unconscious determination to be that at any cost, in defiance even of all sense, seemed to be the motivation of their entire conduct, and their chief mutual bond. And this mere longing for difference, that proclaimed only their lack of fundamental distinction, and their resentment of that fact, continued to tell Will, without his knowing, that he had to do with little people whose pathos was measured by their own arrogance.

He forgot about his umbrage against Galbraith, and put aside his anxiety over his debts and difficulties to grow a little calmer, as though infused with some mild, pleasing drug. He watched while Mr. Spike conducted the lessons of his two small sons, after an explanatory diatribe against the ordinary educational systems in vogue.

Mr. Spike's improvement on these seemed to consist principally of a kind of crafty bullying of the children, who cowered in dread as he read aloud to them from a treatise on mathematics and then paused and with a steely eye asked them to explain to him what it meant. When he had at length reduced them to tears, and upbraided them for being craven as well as ignorant, it was clear that his good humour

had been restored, and he then affably suggested to Will that he would show him over the estate.

Giles, though privately sickened by the treatment of the two small boys, was still sorrier for the man who had had to stoop to such an advantage, and responded with the most cordial alacrity. They went outside together. With a stick Mr. Spike pointed out the various fields on his property. They seemed to be running to seed and were enclosed by walls that were tumbling down to meet them. He began to explain in his grandiose way how he had decided to have a large, winding watercourse run through them, turn one into an elaborate athletic playground, and still another into an Italian garden with cypresses, fountains, and statuary—his own statuary, of course. As he grew more and more preposterous in this Aladdin-like vision, even Will could not help saying mildly:

"But won't that all cost a good deal of money?"

Mr. Spike laughed indulgently. "A great deal of money," he said. "Yes, a very great deal!" He looked at Giles as if hesitating whether or not to trust him, and then, making up his mind, said with mysterious solemnity: "Come with me!"

He then led the way to a small, wooden shed in the rear of the place. Inside, in the midst of much debris, could be seen a turning lathe, various drills and punches, and other nondescript tools and supplies. Mr. Spike removed a strip of canvas that was spread over a work-bench, and said with impressive quietness:

"I don't see any reason why I shouldn't show it to you. The final patents should come through in only a few days now."

Giles stared blankly. He observed a metal shape whose significance for a moment eluded him. Then he made out that it was some kind of firearm or other. At the sight of his puzzled eyes, Mr. Spike laughed genially as if forgiving his ignorance, or as if in some peculiar way he had scored over him. And hardly waiting for an invitation, he began

to describe at once, with an effect of insulting his hearer, the invention before him.

This, it turned out, was an automatic military rifle, operated by the gases of its own combustion with a brand-new departure in safety devices, and a number of complex and nearly incomprehensible features. Will listened gravely but without understanding a word, while Maynard Spike grew constantly more and more excited by his own talk.

"The Chinese government... already opening negotiations... Do you know what that contract alone will bring?... Can be manufactured at less than a tenth of the cost... May take over the manufacturing myself as a matter of fact... stupidity of most manufacturers in this country simply appalling... wouldn't accept ten million dollars—or fifteen for that matter—for the thing as it stands."

And the extraordinary conviction with which he poured out his flamboyances had its effect on poor Giles, so that he shared the same luxurious dream, and even felt a stab of the most desperate envy of this great fortune.

He then asked how far the negotiations had gone, whereupon Mr. Spike's face clouded, and he gave his moustache a kind of rebuking tug.

"Not far," he admitted. "The fact is, I'm not quite ready yet to discuss final agreements. There is one last improvement to be added before the thing is really workable. The breech block here, to resist the tremendous pressures generated by explosions, has to be forged of high-tension steel, and be specially bored for bolting these flanges. I'm only a few weeks short of completing it. A ridiculous sum—absolutely ridiculous!—is necessary for the final tooling, yet here I am stopped like that. It's really unspeakable!" He glared angrily at Giles as if this were possibly his fault.

Giles said it was too bad, and Mr. Spike agreed with a savage nod.

"I shall have to look about for a little more capital," he said darkly. "Not that I expect to have much difficulty

about that! All I need to do is to show this to any expert, you understand. I'm prepared to be generous. For a bare five hundred dollars, I actually intend to offer a twentieth share, possibly even a tenth! A million and a half for five hundred dollars, eh? I don't anticipate any trouble finding takers of that, do you?"

But he looked at Will so searchingly, that Giles saw the question held still another within it, and on an impulse of the weakest vanity, he was surprised to hear himself saying suddenly:

"Peraps I might be able to find someone for you—one of my patients, maybe——"

Mr. Spike's eyes grew instantly animated.

"The very thing!" he agreed with speed. "We will certainly have to talk about this later, when I can go into it more fully. Just now I think lunch is ready. I want you to taste Daphne's cooking—you will find it a new experience."

Giles did, indeed. But he was now growing so accustomed to having the insufferable presented as the superb that he was scarcely surprised at the wretched meal to which he and Emma sat down with the fixed, beaming smiles of delighted guests. Some carrots that had a quality of having been cooked in stale grease, were mixed with tough chunks of beef heart. This was followed by a cherry pie from which many of the stones had failed to be removed, and upon which, all unprepared, Giles nearly broke a tooth. A pot of coffee that was plainly the result of several reboilings of the same grounds fetched up the meal with a kind of satiric conclusion, whereupon Will sat back and tried to look surfeited with content.

But worse than this ordeal was the one into which his vanity had led him to blunder by offering to help Mr. Spike to finish his invention. Long-suffering as he could be, even his nerves were on edge before the hideously boring afternoon was over. For Mr. Spike would not let him alone, he would not talk of anything else. He fetched out blueprints, charted specifications, even a laborious, pompous prospectus

of his automatic gun, and with a belligerent, merciless persistence described in the obscurest technical terms every stage of its development from the moment its magnificent conception had first come to him until now when he was but a stone's throw away from triumphant completion.

Trapped as he had been by his own wish to appear both generous and powerful, Giles was unable to extricate himself from his false position, and all his flounderings only sucked him in deeper. He heard Mr. Spike rasping on in a forbidding voice as if he had already taken the conclusion for granted:

"And I want you to make it clear to your rich patients, furthermore, that this trifling investment will not give them any right to try to dictate to me or to advise me! I know perfectly well what I am doing, and I demand always a free hand. Trust me, and you will get everything, my dear sir; that is what I always say. Interfere and just see what happens!"

Will nodded with a now mechanical enthusiasm. His jaw was beginning to ache from the arrested muscles that had ordered a smile without the emotion of one.

That night, as he slept restlessly on a camp cot with a mattress that constantly bunched up, through all his dreams there ran the sound of Mr. Spike's nagging and indignant voice.

Nor the next day was there any avoiding of this single topic, so that before noon Giles gazed anxiously forward only to the time of leaving like a prisoner upon the last unbearable hours of a long sentence.

Then he was safe at last, safe in the train with Mr. Spike's handclasp still warm in his fingers, Mr. Spike's wrangling demands echoing in his ears, Mr. Spike's wad of blueprints and specifications in his pocket; and Emma, meek and obedient at his side. He looked at her gratefully; she met his eyes with a timid smile. For a moment, in mutual compassion and mutual pain, they were lovers.

After taking Emma home, Giles went at once to the

tenement. He was surprised to find Galbraith there with his mother waiting for him, for he had not arranged to meet him until the following day. A lively impatience, an eagerness to report excellent progress, showed clearly in Galbraith's plain, good-natured face. And this, more than anything else, brought Will solidly down to reality with depressing vividness. For Mr. Spike's onslaught had at least managed to make him forget his troubles for a moment, and had caused them to seem somehow remote. Now he was fetched sharply back to his own concerns, and felt immediately frightened, depressed, and acutely uncertain.

With a bitter heart he listened to Galbraith's bursting news, while Mrs. Giles nodded and chirruped an irritatingly cheerful accompaniment. On Saturday, while Giles had been away, Galbraith had not let the grass grow under his feet. He had immediately managed to unearth an opening for a staff physician in a big corporation with many employees. A little tact, the right approach, and the appointment was as good as secured. Giles was just what they needed. The salary, while not large, would be sufficient to rescue him from all his difficulties within six months' time.

As Galbraith, a trifle boastfully and repetitiously, went on enlarging upon this happy chance, a fit of irresistible perversity came over Will. He grew stiff with obstinacy and became stupidly reckless. And gnawed by humiliation, he felt as if Galbraith were actually rejoicing in his downfall. He pursed up his lips and began to make a sound like a subdued whistling, while at the same time he tried to look very cool and detached. Then all at once, letting himself go without heed, he heard his own voice saying:

"Very nice of you to go to all that trouble for me, George, very nice! But I'm not really sure I want to do anything like that. Don't think I need to, you see. That kind of thing is O.K. for you, of course, but all I really need right now is a little capital to tide me over. And it just happens I ran into something on my trip—I'm considering it rather seriously. Look here, I'll show you..."

He fumbled nervously, in spite of his longing to display a disdainful calm, and brought out Mr. Spike's blueprints. He spread these out in front of Galbraith.

"It's the design of a new automatic gun—a military rifle—practically complete," he said aggressively.

Galbraith gave him an uncomprehending look.

"But what about it? What's it got to do with you?"

"I was thinking about finding someone to invest in it," Giles said belligerently. "If I can get hold of a few dollars right away and put it into this, I can make a fortune—take care of everything—yes, of you, too, George."

"Are you serious?" Galbraith burst out with a stupefied face.

"Of course I'm serious," Giles answered sulkily, furious at his inability to meet Galbraith's eyes.

The ship's physician emitted a short, incredulous laugh.

"Why, you must be out of your mind! You must be crazy!"

Giles had been growing angrier and angrier at his own weakness and folly, and transferred this feeling to Galbraith. His lip curled. That an eccentric like Galbraith, a poor, half-cracked failure for all his big, table-thumping airs and windy loudness, should call him crazy and look down on him as a fool, was insupportable. A flush filled his pale, transparent skin, and his mild eyes stared with feeble defiance.

"If I were to tell you that the Chinese government has already opened negotiations for this," he began in a compressed voice, when Galbraith interrupted him violently:

"The Chinese government—hell!"

Will's reason was gone now; he wanted only to injure, and he did not care what means he chose, or even whom he injured, though it should include himself, too.

"I wasn't asking for your opinion," he said shakily. "I guess I know what I'm doing all right! I don't need any ship's doctor to tell me what to do! And what's more, I think I've had enough of your butting into my affairs!"

Want me to make the same mess of my life you've made of yours, I suppose! Well, I can run myself, thanks, and I don't want no help from you neither!"

There was silence in the tawdry, malodorous room; Mrs. Giles picked mournfully at her skirt. Galbraith recovered himself first. He smiled uneasily. His voice was mild.

"Listen, Will, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I'm only trying to help you. I'll apologize. But you've got to listen to me—this is the time when you've got to keep your head. And what I think you should do——"

Beside himself, Giles shrieked out: "Shut up! I've told you for the last time what I think of you and your damned help! I'd just as soon you'd get out of here right now, too!"

Galbraith stood bewildered. There was a puzzled look on his big features. He glanced over at Mrs. Giles, saying as if pleading:

"Nellie, you talk to him—tell him what we just both agreed——"

Mrs. Giles was trembling throughout her tiny body. Her own voice had a faint, sad sound as if it came from a great way off, out of a tomb.

"Whatever Will says he's got to do," she faltered. "I won't go against Will——"

Galbraith's head went down again. He heaved a deep and unconcealed sigh.

"Maybe tomorrow," he said forlornly. "What about tomorrow, Will? Let's forget everything we've said, and talk this over tomorrow."

He held out his hand with a humble air. But with his rage now feeding upon itself, Giles childishly turned his back.

After a pause Galbraith asked quietly. "You really want me to leave you alone, do you? That's it, is it?"

"Sure," said Giles in the hardest tone he could manage, "that's it. God Almighty, do I have to keep saying it all night to make you believe me!"

Galbraith did not answer this time. His face was stony. He picked up his hat and went softly to the door as though

fearful of waking some sleeper there, or disturbing an invalid. And the door closed upon him so softly that it was several seconds before Will realized he had really gone.

A ghastly feeling, in which there was an active horror of loneliness, rushed over him. He longed to run after Galbraith and fetch him back, abasing himself in frantic contrition. And while he stood vacillating there, he imagined Galbraith steadily receded from him, going soundlessly down the stairs and out of his life, around the corner in the crowd, and then lost in the crowds of the world, and not ever to be found again. He lifted his head and his eyes met his mother's fatuous smile.

"I'm sure you did the right thing Will," she quavered. "Imagine it! George telling anyone like you what to do! Why, I don't blame you a bit."

This dreadful championship, in which fidelity to intelligence had been made subordinate to fidelity to a sentimental idea of conduct, dragged Giles to a still lower plane. His eyes held a look of suffering, but his pride caused him to mutter some dull sounds of agreement. He said he was tired, forced a yawn to prove it, and went to bed.

But not to sleep. He lay there peering feverishly into the darkness, aware that in her own cubicle Mrs. Giles lay sleepless, too, with an effect of listening to him think. He upbraided himself for his cowardly attack upon Galbraith, and even more for the irreplacable loss of Galbraith's warm aid. What, indeed, was he to do now? Tomorrow would be Monday, offices would open and stores and banks, and unwelcome, terrifying life would vigorously begin.

All at once an unexpected consideration leaped upon him galvanically. He had glibly paraded Spike's invention in front of Galbraith with no other intention at first than that of annoying him; where on earth could *he* find anyone with the money to complete it and the willingness to do so? But suppose he himself, even at this juncture, could think of something, suppose he himself found the money for it! And lulled and drugged by Spike's irresistible self-confidence,

hypnotized by the grand sums the inventor had so casually flung about, Giles did not for an instant entertain the idea that these things might be no more than dreams. The insuperable difficulty of getting his hands on enough money to buy the tenth share in a colossal fortune made him take the certainty of the fortune itself for granted. And the answer followed upon the heels of his impulse, and seemed so simple that he wondered why it had not occurred to him immediately. A loan company would advance him enough on his professional status, his establishment, surely! And Spike had promised that it was only a matter of a few weeks, perhaps less, before the gun would be in final shape for the arrangement of some immense, governmental contract. With that in view Giles could surely hold off everything a little longer—the overdue payments on his equipment, his overdue rent, all the minor exacerbating bills and debts—and then triumphantly clear them off, one and all at a bound. In two weeks—just two weeks—call it three, say—that could happen!

Giles moved in his bed convulsively. If it had been possible, in his anxiety and impatience, he would have dressed and called upon a personal finance company immediately. His brain seethed with glowing pictures; he saw the check for his share in his fingers, the red cuts of the machine that had stamped upon it a delicious series of ciphers. Why hadn't he realized immediately this was the thing to do, that he had blundered into a golden opportunity! Why, he would move his mother out of this sordid place within a month, then buy that house for her, a mansion, and perhaps spring it as a surprise!

"There it is, Mom! How does that strike you? Well, you know what I always told you!"

And Galbraith—poor Galbraith! He would hunt him up again, make amends handsomely, and luxuriate in Galbraith's confused, belated awe. He would be good to Galbraith, set him up, by heavens!—get him out of that humdrum, hopeless service in which he was skulking.

Will began to smile, and the smile remained fixed upon his simple face as he drifted into sleep.

He awoke with less excitement, but with no diminution of his resolve. That noon hour he called at the office of a loan company whose advertisement he had seen in the newspapers. The interview did not take long. His answers seemed to be satisfactory. And three days later he received a letter to say that the money was waiting for him on his signature. He wired Mr. Spike immediately, and Mr. Spike telephoned him back at once, and said warmly he would come to Boston the very next day. They went together to a lawyer's, who drew up a contract for which Will paid. He handed over the borrowed money, shook hands with Mr. Spike, listened with pleasure to the inventor's congratulations on his sagacity, and walked back to his office on air, with the contract in his pocket. That afternoon he read it between consultations until he had it almost by heart. He laughed out loud once or twice when he was alone. How surprised everyone was going to be! For he had said nothing to his mother or Emma what he had done. He was aware that their eyes had searched his face, as if made uneasy by the extraordinary high spirits which he had been unable to conceal in the last few days.

Two weeks went by, then a third, during which Giles dropped unopened into a drawer those letters whose superscriptions he had most feared to see. He thought almost voluptuously of Mr. Spike in his small workshop, and of the eager Chinese government. He was so good-humoured that he cracked jokes with his handful of patients almost like his mother, and caused them to look at him with distrust as if he had been drinking.

On the fourth week, when there was still no word from Spike, Giles began abruptly to grow uneasy. Had something unforeseen happened? Why didn't Spike keep in touch with him as he had promised? He now sped to the door at every mail, finding there only further letters from the telephone company, the electric-light service, the equipment supply

houses, the landlord, and, of course, the packages of free samples of drugs and nostrums. And now at last there arrived the notice of the first payment required on his loan.

His high spirits had altogether deserted him, he no longer made any jokes, and often started violently at unexpected sounds. Then, unable to bear the suspense a moment more, he telegraphed Mr. Spike to telephone him upon receipt of it.

Mr. Spike was not so prompt this time. When, after agonizing hours, he did call, his voice had an aggrieved sound; there was something actually indignant about it.

Will's hand, holding the receiver, began to tremble as he picked out of some patronizing and irrelevant utterances the fact that still more money was needed to complete the invention. But it was now a still smaller sum, and after that, beyond the shadow of a doubt, everything would be finished. Mr. Spike uttered some lofty comments, accompanied by a disagreeable laugh, at Giles' frantic mumble that he could not possibly get hold of another penny. Spike said pityingly that it was too bad, since as it was now, the thing was useless, and it was a shame to throw it all away for the lack of a trifle. Giles' head was burning.

"Wait a minute," he faltered. "Wait a minute! I might be able to get it—I might. But how long do you think—I mean honestly think—it would take you to finish it?"

Mr. Spike's voice was brighter now. "Give me three days," he said firmly. "Three days—that's literally all I ask!"

Giles said he would get in touch with him. He hung up the receiver and rested his head wearily in his hand. Two evenings before at a Medical Society meeting, a young doctor had spoken of his intention of picking up just the sort of equipment in which Giles had invested. He hoped to come upon some second-hand machines somewhere that could be bought reasonably, he said.

Giles recalled this with a beating heart. Of course, he did not exactly own the things himself—not really that was; the title still rested with the supply houses. But Spike's

declaration hammered in his ears—only three days away from completion! Weren't there times when one had to be bold and take tremendous risks? Besides, if he didn't, what *was* he to do? For his obligations had now piled up to such giddy heights he saw no way out from horrifying disaster except this. He juted his round chin out and, picking up the telephone book, began to hunt through its pages in a kind of panic for the name of the doctor who had spoken to him the other night.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

GILES AT FIRST supposed the caller was a new patient, a prosperous one for a change.

He was a stout, pink man with an affable air and a voice full of politeness. But not long after he had said: "Can I see you alone for a minute, Doctor?" Giles made the sickening discovery that he had to do with a collection agent for the unpaid medical equipment.

Would he glance about and notice that some of this—a good half of it, even—had disappeared? But the plump, friendly caller did not seem to be suspicious. Perhaps he did not even know what the things looked like! All he wanted to know was how soon—the very earliest—Giles thought he could pay something on account. If not—and his voice sank to a pitch of the gentlest regret—it would be necessary for his company to repossess the articles in question. Could Giles do anything within a week? He thought his company might be willing to be patient that much longer. Yes, he was sure he could persuade them to hold off for one more week.

With a chalky face on which was imprinted the most wretched simulacrum of a smile, Giles said a week would be quite sufficient, he would take of everything by then. He rubbed his hands together and remarked that it was a fine day as he ushered his visitor to the door. But when it

was closed he leaned up against it in one of those artificial demonstrations of terror that are picked up often as not from the conventions of the theatre, and being put to real use, finally become, in spite of their grotesque representations of emotion, perfectly sincere.

He groaned. His lips pressed flabbily upon each other as cold as corpses. The company would come, discover its possessions gone, and in the end it would tortuously come out that he had sold them. He was more than ruined: vistas of actual jail sentences swam sickeningly before him. He must do something, something! And still there was no word from Spike.

He made up his mind to go and see the inventor at once, this very instant. Recalling the patients who had appointments with him today, he hastily wrote out a small card that said he had been summoned unexpectedly, fixed it in the front door, and in a kind of desperate haste made his way to North Station. Luckily he had not long to wait for a train, and early that afternoon a hired hack deposited him expensively and without warning at the door of The Bastion.

Even in his agonized condition, Giles grimly made out that the building had indefinably been expanded since his first visit, as if some money had been paid out for necessary improvements. Mrs. Spike's hair showed an unbecoming permanent wave, the two children appeared to be wearing brand-new clothes, and Mr. Spike himself glowered at him with surprise from a puce-coloured dressing gown that gave him the air of a vulgar savant.

His tormented anxiety kept Will, at any rate, from beating about the bush. He burst out at once about his difficulties. Even so he did not upbraid or rail; he merely pleaded. Mr. Spike, perceiving that he himself was not in the least danger, grew more and more scornful. At the same time he appeared to be obscurely touched.

"I had no idea this was such a strain on you," he said in the tone of a rebuking schoolmaster. "Naturally I supposed

you knew there is always a certain margin of risk in these things. I thought you merely enjoyed taking a little gamble with me. Not, of course, that it will be a gamble eventually. Oh, no, my dear sir, you will find out one of these days what an investment you've made. But meanwhile you will have to be patient. The steel forging I had ordered turned out to be utterly unsatisfactory—it will take experiment, constant experiment, before we can say, 'There it is!' But we will say it! I assure you, have no uneasiness on that score! So, if you will simply wait——"

"But I can't wait!" Will cried frantically. "They're coming for my equipment next week! I've told you about that—don't you realize they may even arrest me?"

Mr. Spike shook his head regretfully. He touched his moustache and thought. At last he made a gesture of satisfaction and said grandly:

"I'm sorry for you, Doctor, very sorry! And I'm not heartless, as I think you will find out! I trust you. I am going to put the gun in your hands—take it back to Boston yourself, show it to anyone you like—raise money on it! I empower you to sell another tenth share. Send me half the money, and keep the rest to clear off your debts!"

Will looked at him as mournfully as a shot deer. He heard himself thanking Spike for his generosity, while loathing filled his heart instead. He lingered a miserable half-hour for no discernible reason, then returned to Boston, carrying the uncompleted automatic gun in a long box. He looked at it now and then with a sad, enigmatic expression. And somehow he still managed to believe in it, to believe it would some day rescue him from his countless difficulties just as Mr. Spike said.

He reached his office before dark, put the rifle tenderly away in a closet, and with a feeling of flatness that was as profound as an ailment, asked himself wearily what he should do next. A wave of passionate regret came over him at the thought of how he had driven Galbraith away. Why had he done that? If only he knew someone who would

lend him some money! But did he know anyone with enough money to lend? Then in his misery there suddenly burst upon him, like a flash of light, the recollection of his friendship with Alfred Zacharias.

Zacharias was only an obscure instructor, of course, but Giles subscribed to the general conviction that Jews always had a secret hoard somewhere, or at least knew how to get hold of one in a pinch. And Zacharias had always been fond of him, altogether sympathetic. Will remembered with a trembling, lost smile how Zacharias used to come to his rescue on the *K-13* when he had suffered those dreadful seizures of claustrophobia. And he remembered with exultation, too, how in those ghastly moments just after the collision, it was he who had dragged Zacharias out of the flooding bulkhead into safety. Zacharias would be able to help him. And Zacharias would surely not refuse!

Already Giles' head seemed lighter, so much so that he felt a little giddy. Hurriedly, he began to write a letter, but had not scrawled two lines before he saw this would not do; the sum needed was too frighteningly large for a written request. No, he would have to go to New York and see Alfred personally. He would go tomorrow, for there was no time to lose, and the best thing to do would be merely to wire that he was arriving. He picked up the telephone and dictated a message to Alfred at the college in New York that was deceptively undramatic, and indicated merely that he expected to be in the city tomorrow for unnamed reasons, and would Zacharias meet him for late lunch at a certain restaurant?

He felt much better now, almost masterful in the swift decision of his actions. Then he heard the doorbell ring, and knew that at this hour it could only be Emma. She came in, expressing at once by a smile, a coy look, and her passionless kiss, a stronger passion for the idea of their mutuality and her certainty of his possession.

But she must have noticed at once, from his feverish expression and something jerkily restless about him, that he

was labouring under unnatural excitement. He was also probably off his guard; and controlling herself and making everything seem as calm as possible by her matter-of-fact voice and wooden responses, Emma began to drop casual questions. Before he knew it Giles had cleared up all that had previously been mystifying her. With a feeling that the difficulties his folly had plunged him into were as good as over, he suddenly found relief in confessing everything. Secretly shocked, almost terrified, Miss Bass managed to wear upon her face a serene aspect as she drew the last detail of his financial blunders out of him.

At the end, when there was clearly nothing else to be learned, she gave vent to her own distress, since there was no longer any occasion to win the truth from him by the pretence of ease. Her agitation expressed itself in gestures that were almost spasmodic, her eyes glittered, and she shook her head from side to side woefully. From her there burst out unconnected fragments, one of which was altogether shocking:

"... the farm ... that Vermont house ... if only I could sell it! But no one has turned up. ... I've tried ... and all my own money——"

Will sent her an alarmed gaze. In that instant, when he knew everything, he made an extraordinary effort, like a man shutting a heavy door that requires the effort of both arms and every muscle, to thrust out of his mind the disgraceful knowledge of Emma's benefaction. He frantically told himself he had heard nothing. And then, not so much to relieve her as to be quit of her harrowing concern over him, he angrily burst out that he was going to New York tomorrow to borrow from a friend who would not dream of refusing.

Miss Bass then grew calmer. She wiped her eyes and tried to smile. She asked in a weak voice what train he intended to take. For the first time it occurred to Will that he had not even the money necessary for the trip. Miss Bass appeared to read his frown at once.

"Where there any checks in the mail today?" she inquired mildly.

He shook his head. His cheerful spirits began to evaporate with volatile rapidity. She opened her purse.

"You'd better let me give you the money for the fare," she said. "You'll need some, won't you?"

Giles said gruffly he would return it as soon as he got back. He patted her on the shoulder reassuringly. They closed up the office and walked silently down the street.

In order to keep the appointment he had made by telegram, Giles took an early morning train. He said nothing to his mother; after all, he would be back that evening with the money safe in his pocket, and could tell her everything then.

The five-hour journey seemed interminable. Long before New Haven, he felt he had been on the train forever. And the worst of it was, the closer he drew to New York the more uncertain and timid he became. Things no longer seemed so rosy as they had when the impulse had first come over him yesterday. Zacharias might be away, or he might not have received the message, or he might be unable to keep the appointment. Giles did not for a moment consider the possibility of refusal, focusing only upon the preliminary difficulty of the meeting.

He looked bad, almost ill, when at last he got in, a little before one o'clock. He went at once to the chophouse he had named and which he knew only by reputation. He gazed vacantly and with scared eyes at the hearty, seemingly carefree men who were lunching agreeably. He could see no sign of Zacharias anywhere. With terror in his heart he sat down on a kind of bench near the entrance and waited, consulting his watch now and then with an important frown.

When he had almost given up hope, Zacharias showed up at last. Giles had instantly a profound sense of being rescued; he saw that Zacharias was unaffectedly glad to see him. They found a table down the room, Zacharias

explaining that he had late classes on this morning and had been delayed, but that now he had a good interval free and they could have a long, leisurely talk.

They ordered, and looked at each other critically yet warmly; they spoke first of the others. Alfred said he had run into Adam in the subway a month ago. His lip curled as he spoke. Will mentioned that Julian Gamble had paid him a flying visit quite a while back, but he did not go into details about it. Then Zacharias asked him about himself.

Will had not intended to, but he was unable not to wish to cut a good figure in his old friend's eyes. He said he was doing very well, he had a large practice and it was steadily growing. While he went on speaking, seeing all the time Zacharias' compassionate eyes on him, and feeling that Zacharias did not really believe his jaunty declarations of success, he was desperately considering only how he should come to the point, whether to blurt out his demand with a face-saving bluntness, or whether to begin slowly and bit by bit lead up to the shameful request. In any case his spirit quailed at the prospect. Beneath his abrupt laughter, his projection of tenderness, he was utterly miserable. He noticed that Zacharias also looked worn, as though he carried about with him some painful sadness. But then Alfred had always been like that more or less, always mysteriously bitter, as though preyed upon constantly by sombre indefinable reflections.

Giles decided to wait until after the coffee. In this little respite he would try to forget what was ahead, and enjoy himself. He listened with grave attention while Zacharias talked. Will did not understand those ideas that have for their aim the alteration of society in any era; he comprehended nothing but individual distress; and that took up too much of one's time to allow any left over for a concern about the mass made up by these individuals.

He nodded meekly when Zacharias began to suggest that Will himself should do something in the movement, should

be an influence among his patients in the shaping of the new, advancing world. He gazed upon Alfred's taut face with gentleness. Almost he was sorry for him. He felt more confident now. He would ask him what he had come for, the moment they had finished their coffee.

But when that was done, he still put it off. He would wait until the very last moment. For he could not bear the thought of his own stumbling voice, and the surprised, possibly contemptuous look that would certainly come into Alfred's eyes. He moistened his dry lips and went on nodding and smiling. The talk grew more and more desultory. Was it possible, was it really possible, that Zacharias was growing a little bored? Had they endured that horror on the *K-13* together and striven so violently for a return to life only for such a meeting as this?

Zacharias glanced at his watch. He muttered that it was much later than he had had any idea: he would have to be going at once. And now, when he must speak or not at all, the tongue clove to the roof of Giles' mouth. For a last instant the opportunity was there; he closed his frightened eyes against it, telling himself that anything, anything, was better than that. He found himself shaking hands, smiling wanly outside in the street; saw Zacharias start briskly in one direction, and then with a hideous briskness of his own started off in the other.

He got on board his train with a dazed feeling covered by a ludicrous dignity. He did not think about anything. Once he went out to the dark, rattling platform, but as he stood mournfully there, he began to be revisited for the first time in a long while by his aberration of claustrophobia. Suddenly he found himself fighting for breath, and a wave of acute panic rode over him. He turned and made a staggering rush inside. He was vaguely conscious of the curious glances of several of the other passengers at the sight of his agitated face. But sinking down into his seat, he pleaded fiercely with himself. With an effort he picked up a discarded newspaper beside him, and sternly stared at it

without taking in a line. Then gradually the horror began to leave him. His breath came more regularly. He felt only very tired.

His train did not get in until almost eight. He started walking home. In a way he was glad to be back, as if his terrors were in some strange way old friends, and at least more endurable than the loneliness of unfamiliarity. He had almost reached his shabby neighbourhood when, coming down the street from the opposite direction, he saw a figure that had the coincidence of resemblance. For the tall, stout man approaching him conveyed to his nervous imagination a sharp similarity to the polite collection agent who had recently called upon him.

Though he knew it was no more than a resemblance, Will acted unthinkingly. With an effect of darting out of sight, he stepped quickly through the doorway of a store he was just passing.

It happened to be a place that he had noticed often before, for he had passed it twice a day on his way to and from his office. It was a shop that sold books on theosophy, obscure religions, and incomprehensible mystic-philosophies. The windows were always full of these books with their strange titles. Will had often dimly wondered what sort of people purchased such things, and how the little store had managed to survive.

Now as he entered so precipitately, he looked around him confusedly. In his agitation, his breath had become rather rapid. Several people were inside browsing about, or chatting together in low murmurs. They had the quality of a kind of club. They seemed to know each other and to have something odd in common. The logic of his scientific training had always led Giles to conceive of the inhabitants of this world as no more than cases requiring psychological attention. Then he was aware that the proprietor was coming toward him, bending down a large, white forehead under which peered out deeply set, mournful eyes.

"Can I help you?"

"I'd just like to glance around, thanks. You have an interesting store."

The proprietor nodded and smiled.

"It is more than a store, we hope. The world that merely thinks it is real is outside that window. It does not know that it doesn't even exist. It doesn't know reality is in here—the dream is reality."

He poured out this obscure declaration with the utmost solemnity; for some reason Will looked at him as if heartened. Certainly he felt all at once lulled, soothed, mysteriously peaceful. The world was certainly outside. It was a pity he had to return to it. The odd-looking man with the big white brow and deep eyes seemed to be protected from it somehow. Will sighed, like a child upon a pillow. He felt in no hurry to get along home now. He stared about gently, a little reverently, as sightseers stand bareheaded in a church.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

ZACHARIAS HAD SEEN much more clearly into Will than the latter supposed. His own education in the mysteries of poverty had given him too sharp a perception of its signs for any concealments to be proof against it; he had detected at once not only that Will was in trouble, but that he was carrying the burden of some immediate, dreadful anxiety which nine chances out of ten had to do with money.

Alfred was sincerely moved by this comprehension, but while he pitied Giles, and in a way even suffered for him, his cold caution remained immovably fixed, and there was no actual struggle between these two opposing attitudes. They simply existed side by side in perfect amity, as though in one body he comprised two contrasting identities.

No, he was not for a minute tempted to give poor Will the gentle push that would project him into some full desperate admission together with an entreaty for help; and

he solaced himself with the conviction that Will was merely one more victim of the source of general misery and could be rescued from his folly along with uncounted millions of others only by the overthrowing of that source. It was not his fault, Alfred said to himself, that Will was so weak in intelligence as not to perceive this fact. Will, too, would have to add his punishment to the universal punishment until it amounted to such size as to topple over the social structure which had created it.

He went his way, and dismissed Giles almost immediately from his mind, seeing that all Giles longed for was the chance to serve faithfully the world that was so despicably betraying him.

Alfred had grown subtly older in only the last few months with an effect of becoming quieter. His bursts of impetuosity were exchanged now for a deliberate scheming, and his determination was at once less noisy and more implacable. His belief burned in him like a sheltered, steady fire; he no longer thought of anything else, and hugged his loneliness to himself with a bitterness about which there was something incongruously satisfying. He had given up living at home almost as soon as he had returned to his work in the college, and had taken a small, cheap, furnished flat in the same neighbourhood. His family that adhered to traditions of almost tribal antiquity got on his nerves these days, and the moist, mournful eyes which they cast upon him in stupid reproach and stupider pleading set his teeth on edge.

He had even broken with Uncle Harry, who had screamed at him that he was a fool in the most obscene quarrel imaginable, and had told him never to come near him again, never under any circumstances.

"If you was dying in the gutter, starving so," cried Uncle Harry disgustedly, "I wouldn't hand you even a toothpick! No, not if you was to change upside down! I ain't giving you no more chances, Alfred. It's all done, all through—that's the way Harry Silverstein is! So it's good-bye forever—loafer! And don't you call me up till you get good and

ready to act like you was a gentleman and got sense again!"

Alfred was glad to be alone for a variety of reasons. He was able to pamper himself with the exotic foods he liked, lingering lovingly over a choice of spiced meats in the nearest delicatessen, and to guard himself from potential ills by an accumulation of wares from the corner drugstore. He spent a sizable portion of his little stipend on these things.

But though he was constantly growing more selfish, more engrossed by the bachelor's concern over ease and physical well-being, he at the same time had become almost pure in his devotion to his single idea.

His flat served another purpose besides the cultivation of his own freedom: it served as the headquarters of a kind of club.

For now that Irving Fineman was gone, Alfred had become the leader of all those in the college activated by a groping demand for a new world society. And he had sensibly decided to give up interspersing his mathematics course with passionate harangues that had nothing to do with it. That was at once too dangerous and too futile a procedure. It would accomplish nothing except to give him the reputation of a college eccentric. Instead, he let it be known how he felt, and what intense purpose he carried with him; and inviting first one and then another of those students who gave signs of being sympathetic or interested, he soon managed to make his dim little apartment convey the romantic significance of a secret meeting-place where important thoughts were to be cultivated and audacious actions plotted.

There was now an irregular group that wandered in and out and made themselves at home here. There were a couple of other instructors besides Alfred, but the majority of the group comprised students.

Over glasses of hot tea, in an atmosphere thick with smoke, they wrangled and argued. All the radical papers could be found here and all sorts of books about the Russian experiment.

And they might have continued without harm to themselves this way, like many similar groups around the country, had it not been that the forces opposed to them in the world, exaggerating the danger of the radical faction, were becoming fearful.

It was because of this that Alfred's clique met its downfall. It happened that an irresponsible undergraduate named Kelly had become the boldest expounder of the new creed. He first shocked his respectable family by offering to bring his mistress home to live, and next contributed his tuition money to the funds of a garment-workers strike. His parents had gone to their priest for help, and then to an Irish magistrate to protest against the teachings with which their unruly son was being inculcated in an accredited institution of learning.

At once there began those formal, solemn procedures that resemble the operations of some cumbrous machine, that appear to have no head and no design, yet are as orderly and inexorable as a tide. There were loud outcries for immediate investigation by special committees.

Alfred, summoned to the office of the president of the college for an ominous interview, felt his heart sink and all his courage desert him. He was perfectly aware that he was known as the chief instigator of what had been going on, and had been glad to be known as that, but among the rewards of leadership he had not visualized the possibility of martyrdom.

He agreed with a chalky face to submit to the fullest investigation, promising to explain everything. Thus far no names had been mentioned in the newspapers outside of the Kelly family and the outraged magistrate who was taking action on their behalf. But the subheadings of columns were sufficiently sensational: "Magistrate Callahan Charges City Institution Is Hotbed of Radicalism," or "Assert Professors Inciting Student Body to Bolshevism."

Alfred sneaked into his own flat as if a thousand eyes were watching him, and looked resentfully at the young

men eagerly waiting for him there. With the greatest trepidation he learned he was to be summoned for a hearing by a mayor's committee on the following Friday. In the next few days he had an air of trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, while all the while his mind was busily occupied in inventing plausible answers to all possible questions he might be asked.

On the Thursday before his hearing, he went downtown to secure some new clothes with the intention of making as good an impression as possible upon the mayor's committee, which was to be made up of members of the Board of Education, the original Irish magistrate who had set the investigation in motion, and a couple of correctly principled citizens who had been picked out for the safety of their opinions.

He had nervously finished his shopping in a large department store and had just stepped into a descending elevator when he beheld a tall, strikingly beautiful young woman smiling at him in a way that had an effect of dazzling. Then he perceived she was Myra Jordan, and he turned quite pale.

Without realizing it, he had actually thought of her almost ceaselessly during all this first semester. With wonder he looked back upon the callow suicidal impulse that had possessed him on his return from his vacation visit to Uncle Harry, yet the anguished feelings, which had made that seem suitable at the time, remained unchanged. He had plagued himself still more with forthright sensual imaginings of the excitements he had been denied. And so superior did the obvious allurements and satisfactions seem in her, that he shrank from all wretched, lesser embraces, and ever since had remained perfectly chaste.

As he now raised his eyes pitifully, and saw her more brilliant, smiling eyes appraising him with the feminine curiosity as to whether her spell had lasted and he was still her uncorrupted possession, he felt so shaken that he could not even force the pretense of a smile in return.

And there was something unscrupulous about the way in

which she had now decked herself out: the expensive, fashionable hat that told a cunning lie, the clothes that hinted with exquisite refinement at her intoxicating body, and the long, slender legs in the sheerest of black stockings, declared by an unspoken statement that the hopes she so deliberately aroused were false, and temptations she presented to everyone were on sale for only the very highest, exclusive bidders.

"Alfred!" he heard her exclaim. "How are you? And what are you doing? I'm so glad——! Look, I've got to get off on the next floor. Are you busy?" Her hand barely touching his arm commanded him as irresistibly as the wand of a magician.

He stepped off with her with a dreary face, and with other staring faces all around him in the elevator blurring into a kind of foolish vacancy. He saw her stand for a moment looking at him still with a little smile that said she was sorry for him, that said she was so little interested by him as to like him, and that, after all, she could not help having her extraordinary effect upon him, so she might as well enjoy it. He longed savagely in that instant to taunt her for her vanity, but he could not, for he thought she had every right to it; and he found himself merely answering her questions with careful correctness, yet without knowing how he was able to answer them at all, telling her he was now living in a flat up near the college, and uttering the commonplace facts behind which hide the actual truths of a mind, of a life.

"And are you as interested as ever in your Communism?" she now asked in the most amiable of derisive voices. "Are you still going to turn the world upside down for all of us, Alfred?"

He gave her a haggard look, thinking of the hearing he must face tomorrow morning and the desperate pass to which his affairs had come, and, unable to explain anything, after a moment said, yes, he was still interested.

Then she seemed to have one of her careless impulses and, explaining that she had only a little more shopping to do,

and then was to meet young Louis Hartzheim for tea, asked Zacharias to come along with her until she had finished and afterward join them. And her affectionate air that suggested that it was perfectly fair to sustain a friendship in which on one side there could be nothing but tender contempt and on the other nothing but agony, filled him with a perverse desire for that very torment. He said in a flat tone he would like to do so very much, and he walked on with her to a special department of higher-priced women's dresses, where she deposited him on a circular seat in an atmosphere of perfume and soft lights along with her coat and handbag while she went in quest of more adornments that would hurt him.

Sitting there forlornly, Alfred had the sense of singular inadequacy felt by most men among wares made exclusively for women. He gazed around him with a dead stare at the abstracted, engrossed faces of the other women wandering thoughtfully about, rapidly picking over racks of dresses in cabinets, or scrutinizing themselves with frowns in various mirrors. There was something so practical and unromantic about their expressions as to make the thought of all sentimental love an abhorrent folly. And there were no other men here, so that he had a baffled feeling of resentment in his lowly docility like a kind of eunuch. All at once Myra was back asking quite anxiously, "Do you like this?" and smoothing down along her hips a gown of gold and red at which Zacharias looked as stupidly and earnestly as if he expected it to say something to him itself.

He mumbled a comment, she was instantly gone again, and presently back once more in still another. With a final irony it came over Alfred that she was now engaged in buying her trousseau, her wedding things to put on expressly for the pleasure of Louis Hartzheim, Jr. A low moan actually broke from him, but she had moved away and did not hear.

His deliverance came after another half-hour which was like a microcosm of some lifetime of patient, mute suffering. Pleased by her purchases, and talking entirely about them,

Myra Jordan led Alfred out of the store. They walked across town a few blocks to a restaurant where she had arranged to be met by her fiancé. Its tiny tables had paper doilies in lacy designs beneath pretty china; all the lights were dim and flattering; and all the food suggestive of catlike delicacy—little sandwiches of olives and nuts, vol au vents of minced and creamed chicken, and small sweet cakes over which flowed rich chocolate sauces.

Miss Jordan and Alfred had found a table down at the end of the room.

"Louis should be here any minute. But let's not wait for him. I'm starved myself." She picked up her menu.

When she had eaten, murmuring with pleasure while she did so, she lit a cigarette, leaned back, and considered Alfred musingly. He was so grim and silent that she asked him what he was thinking. He took his courage in both hands to say savagely:

"I was thinking that I wished you and I were all alone in the world—and there was nobody else alive anywhere. And then—then I'd—I'd——" He gestured at her, as though actually menacing her.

But she only laughed softly, and stretched her long arms a little and surveyed them with satisfaction as though she were in love with them and herself. "And that's the only reason I'm protected now—because of other people? Poor Alfred! I wouldn't be afraid of you even then!"

He dropped his head, and a little shiver passed through him.

Just then, a trifle breathless but not in the least apologetic about his lateness, Louis Hartzheim hove into view. Alfred had had a disagreeable impression of him before, which he was sure did not spring from bitter jealousy alone, and this impression was now fortified.

Young Hartzheim was a bully with his riches for a club, and his conceit was almost insufferable. He cast a suspicious, rather feline glance upon Alfred, and then at once dismissed him as having no weight nor the slightest importance. He was even rather affable in a patronizing way. Alfred peered

at him with narrowed eyes, trying to conceal what he felt, trying hard to despise him, yet feeling instead only a shameful envy. What good times he had, what delicious things he must enjoy, what pleasures!

That was why he wanted Myra, of course, to add her to his collection of beautiful acquisitions. He was lewdly purchasing her, and she, moreover, was calmly allowing herself to be purchased, an idea so intolerably voluptuous to Alfred that it far exceeded the torment of merely seeing her in love with anyone.

Alfred could not stand it any more. He made a great effort like a man dragging himself with exhausted energies out of a quagmire. He mumbled that he had to go. He could not even look at Myra as he said good-bye. He was conscious of the abject impression his back must make as he went toward the door, insecure in his gait and carriage.

Getting out then, he hurried as though running, desperately running to reach the sanctuary of his shoddy furnished flat. He reminded himself urgently of the hearing he must face tomorrow and the turn upon which his career depended. But somehow it had lost its teeth; its promise was simply dull and sombre like the dreary promise of some inevitable operation, and he looked upon it now with feelings of sickness rather than terror.

He shut and locked his door, and during the evening let both bell and telephone ring unanswered. He went to bed early without having eaten. He supposed he would lie there, wretched and restless, hour after hour, yet he fell asleep almost immediately.

In the morning he rose, dressed with much care, and with a serious expression admitted young Kelly and several others of his warmest supporters. They tried to enjoy vicariously the excitement of his ordeal, encouraging him with much irritating bravado. They swore proudly to tell whatever lies were required of them, for it was a foregone conclusion among them all that Alfred should try to clear himself of his charges by guile.

The place in which the hearing was to be given was unimpressively in a downtown office building. Nevertheless, this was in a kind of board room, and a long table and a number of round-backed chairs placed regularly in front of it gave it the cold, machine-like aspect of a court. When Alfred opened the door there were already quite a few people present—most of the mayor's committee with a couple of stenographers in attendance, and a considerable group of others, who could only be reporters, lolling about indifferently against the walls. Alfred mumbled his name, and a place was at once made for him at the long table with excessive courtesy. He looked quickly and anxiously at the faces of his tormentors. The two members of the Board of Education held themselves aloof with an air of icy disapproval, and were thumbing over some formidable-looking typewritten reports together. One of the private citizens, a pink-faced and well-dressed man, smiled politely and remarked to Alfred what beautiful weather they were having. The other, long and horse-faced and sad, regarded him with more frank distaste. Zacharias' trembling mind made the instantaneous note that they were all Gentiles. His blood moved in a shadowy remembrance of a thousand thousand trials out of the dark past. His brain raced, and he told himself like a pledge to God that he would outwit them all!

Then the door opened, and Magistrate Callahan entered. The hearing began. The secretaries' fingers flew over their notebooks; the reporters listened in boredom. Alfred wore a nervous, placating smile, his high voice answered almost too quickly, and he began to try to throw out the impression that this investigation was so absurd as to bewilder him: to take so seriously a handful of students engaged in the study of economics and political theories, who now and then, perhaps, in the mere exuberance of youth, rather foolishly proclaimed their harmless enthusiasm!

He was handling the charges against him admirably, making it plain that he had never attempted to teach any

theories of any sort in his actual classes, and asserting with an effect of superior honesty that the right to his own convictions was the chief, sacred privilege of democracy.

He saw Magistrate Callahan's glowering eyes lose some of their antagonism; the Irishman was beginning in spite of himself to admire him for his cleverness. An appreciative smile now and then passed fleetingly over his tough face; and the Board of Education members fussed with their papers and adjusted their glasses as if vexed at the indication that they were only going to make fools of themselves.

But as he glanced swiftly at the private, influential citizens of the committee, as he saw all these arrayed against him, the contrast between their accidental wealth and power and his own miserable weakness and obscurity filled him with hatred. It was these people who sustained Louis Hartzheim, Jr., and all the Louis Hartzheims everywhere about the world in their undeserved prerogatives.

In this delicately balanced instant of crisis, the thought of Myra Jordan submitting herself to the furthering of Louis Hartzheim's enjoyment, that thought which had somehow been kept at bay during the previous sad night, now rushed over Zacharias with such insinuations that he clutched the table in front of him as though to hold himself fast. And the emotion that now surcharged him destroyed his reason and violently overthrew all his anxious resolutions to keep his head, to lie and dodge and squirm, to outwit his enemies with chicanery. These men before whom he had ignominiously been haled were his enemies, not only because they were the guardians of the abstract systems he longed to overthrow, but because more concretely they guarded young Hartzheim in his privileges.

As if maddened, Alfred flung everything away for a moment of luxurious truth, for the luxury of a single scream of defiance. He heard one of the committee asking: "Then it is true you have at no time advocated the overthrow of the government by force?" and sweeping aside his hesitations like a man clearing a cluttered desk with a blow, throwing

his head back, baring his teeth, and displaying eyes that glittered with declared malevolence, he cried out there was nothing he desired to do more. He saw them start and stare, regarding him intensely; even the reporters had lost their indolence; here was something interesting at last. And though a faint warning voice raced through his mind telling him like the sad voice of a wife that this particular interest was only the spectacle of his own ruin, Alfred could no longer help or control himself. He all at once began to shout at them in reality through a spluttering mouth, brandishing his weak fist. They listened in silence, and when at last he was through, and sat back trembling and emptied, the chairman turned to the others, saying with a smile:

"I think that clears up everything, gentlemen! I don't believe there is any more to be said, or any good reason for prolonging this examination any further."

Chairs scraped back, people began to talk in low voices. No one was looking at Alfred Zacharias any more. It was as if he quite literally had disappeared. Then he got up, too. But when he had reached the door, the reporters were suddenly all around him, and answering nothing, putting his hand out like a man testing the unknown dark, he somehow managed to escape, and soon was out on the street alone, among all the rapid crowds, in the brittle sunshine.

How strange it was to be alone like that, protected by this vast indifference! And Alfred was struck by the astonishing quietness of the most dramatic moments in a life. No one passing by knew anything about him, and no one cared to know. All the intensities of feeling that had burned in him now took on a crazy senselessness as though he had all at once discovered himself wandering through a universe of ghosts, or had been trying to strike some response from the silent, philosophic earth.

He moved along, without any conscious purpose, boarded a subway, went prosaically uptown, and then with a kind of surprise found himself entering a speakeasy near the college in which he had briefly been only once or twice

before. He did not especially want a drink, but there seemed to be something correct about this action. He sat down at a small dirty table and began to drink split alcohol, coloured and villainously flavoured to imitate whiskey.

However, he sipped it slowly as if with zest, and had another and then another.

A slight shudder that mingled relief and regret ran through him. He saw that the calamity he had apprehended was not so dreadful after all. Nothing much would happen to him. He would be dismissed from the college, merely dismissed, that was all. Now that such an event was a certainty, he perceived that he did not even mind. In a way it would be a liberation. He was heartily tired of teaching mathematics, tired of the pettiness of all teaching. But what had actually happened was a far worse thing: he had made a fool of himself.

Yes, he had accomplished nothing by his defiance except a kind of declaration of stupidity. He had, indeed, lost his head, and paraded his futility in front of those stuffy, prosperous, protected citizens whom he could never hope to overthrow except by an inviolable cunning. And why had he done this—by what weakness and what illusion? What had he to do with Myra Jordan after all, or with Louis Hartzheim? Let them go, let them live a little longer in their gulled acceptance of permanent security! He had betrayed his faith by allowing his resentment of them to take first place in his large considerations. He decided that he now despised Myra, and this reflection filled him with a passionate, congratulatory glow.

And in his shamefaced reckoning, he saw the only road now open to him was to bluster, to swagger, to pretend pride where he felt humiliation.

The afternoon deepened. Alfred supposed he must be quite drunk. He had, at any rate, a thickened feeling. Newcomers had begun to crowd the dingy speakeasy. He listened idly to a couple of men, strangers, talking nearby until, like a cork bobbing to the surface of the water, his mind returned

to awareness and he realized they were talking about him. About him! Leaning forward, he asked if he might see the paper that one of them had apparently referred to in the discussion. They handed it over and his eyes widened as he saw what notoriety his outburst had brought him. There it was, with his name in large letters in the heading of the column on the front page, with the magnified details of the incident, and his wild, ridiculous threatenings distorted and exaggerated to such an extent that they half implied he had all the time been secretly engaged in the manufacture of bombs.

The most astonishing blend of shame and elation possessed him. Was it ever actually foolish, he suddenly asked himself, to become so well-known, to become talked about like this? He stared thirstily at his name in those large black letters. What a formidable character this garbled account had made of him! He saw in a surprised flash the manifold advantages of publicity as well as its deep flattery. The figure described as himself was something behind which he could hide, yet by which he could somehow intimidate others.

He got up, squaring his shoulders, and paid for his last drink with a magnanimous air as if he did not really have to do that if he did not want to. He was tempted, as he returned the newspaper to its owner, to say quietly that he was the man they had been talking about, he was Alfred Zacharias! But it was possible they might offer to fight him then; it was just as well to temper glory with discretion.

He made his way back to his flat. Nothing now could have pleased him more than the sight of the small gathering of young men waiting for him there, and the sounds of the ovation with which they greeted him. He perceived he was a hero. He flung his hat into the corner with a careless gesture, and his deep smile said that he had not lost his head, but that he had intended from the start to do exactly what he had done, and so surprise them all.

In the babel of admiring voices all around him, the telephone sprang its cool, bubbling note.

"Those reporters again," young Kelly shouted. "Will you answer them, or do you want me to tell them where to go?"

"I'll talk to them," said Alfred grimly. But when he picked up the receiver, his heart gave a great doleful drop at the sound of Myra Jordan's voice. She said without explanation in a singularly quiet tone that she wanted to see him very much, wouldn't he come up right away?

Fantastic suppositions, as preposterous as dreams, fled across Alfred Zacharias' mind. Perhaps young Hartzheim was there with her, at her shoulder, putting her up to this, and the police had been sent for to arrest him the moment he arrived. Alfred shook his head quickly as though to rid it of such insane conjectures, and tried to collect his faculties and think without fear.

Why should she want to see him and in such a rush? Was it to attack him for the attack he had made upon her world? But why should she do anything like that? Something enigmatic that was contained in the very level directness of her tone filled him with painful curiosity, and remembering how only a short while ago he had loftily dismissed her from his life and scoffed at her fundamental unimportance to him, he tried to hide from himself the miserable eagerness with which he now instantly capitulated. He said he would be right up.

Telling his admirers to stay where they were, he would be back shortly, he recovered his hat, and started uptown. Maximilian Jordan's apartment house was on West End Avenue. It was as gloomy as a Spanish fort. Getting off the elevator and ringing the Jordans' bell, with his breath not obeying him any longer, Alfred found the door opened by Myra herself.

The apartment was sumptuous. It was dim inside under the low lights. Rugs muffled footsteps and shut out the sounds of the streets with completeness. There was a feeling of protection in the deep silence. Moreover, it appeared that Miss Jordan was all alone.

Alfred, with a dry throat, and nervously fumbling his

hat like a servant, followed her into the principal room, where the gleams of a rosewood piano flickered in the shadows, as though repeating the extraordinary lights in Miss Jordan's fine eyes.

She sat down on a davenport, took a cigarette, and then looked over at him with a little thoughtful smile. Her body, with its long intoxicating legs, its sweep of uncoarsened curves that fled into one another without a detectable transition, filled Zacharias' now unhappy eye. Yet in her peculiar intimations of friendliness he relaxed, thinking of Louis Hartzheim only in a remote, sad way.

Then with a start, as he suspiciously watched her from the chair which he had taken some little way off, he heard her say:

"Well, Alfred, you certainly surprised me! I can't tell you how much I admire you."

He gulped. Was she actually serious? Every fine line of her body said so, and the delicately turned arm and wrist, the subtly shaped fingers holding the cigarette with which she faintly gestured. Was it possible—was it really possible—that from the very start she had secretly been as convinced of his idea as he was? But no, he could not accept anything as wild as that, and he instantly realized that what she now admired was not his theories, but his character—the strength and romantic courage that his loss of self-control had falsely suggested.

For a moment he forgot that it had, indeed, only happened as the result of a regrettable accident, and it seemed to him that he had even sincerely intended to perform that action which was bound to have unfortunate consequences. He was filled with a pure longing, to devote himself single-heartedly to his ideal, from now on, regardless of all other consequences. He lifted his head in this moment like a bard, like a prophet, and under the spur of his vision, he said grimly that he was glad she felt like that, and he was going to do more, much more, and never going to stop.

"Just exactly what *are* you going to do?" she now asked,

putting out her cigarette, and setting her chin in her hand to watch him. "Because you've lost your job, I suppose—they won't allow you to teach in your college any more, will they?"

He noticed with delight the serious interest she was now showing in him. He said he was not sure yet just what form his activities would take. The first thing to do, of course, was to organize and get up meetings.

As he rather jerkily went on talking, without much forethought about what he was saying, he had the shadowy impression that she was not listening any longer to his actual words but only to something else, to the intense, wilful sound they carried, perhaps.

A cat had leaped out of the shadows like a darker shadow, and perched beside her, and her fingers were idly stroking it while her eyes remained fixed on the floor and her head was held slightly to one side.

"After all, there are plenty of other ways," he asserted, trying anxiously to recapture her wandering attention, "and much better ways! For instance, I know a man who could write a great proletarian play. And there's a rich woman—Rosamund Ransom—whom, I'm sure, I could get to put up the money. Besides, there's my Uncle Harry—he has theatre connections, you know. Now if I could produce a great play, I could really reach people and make them sit up!"

Miss Jordan seemed to exemplify this by sitting up, herself. During his last few words, her fingers had abruptly ceased to stroke the cat with an effect of attentiveness.

"That's a wonderful idea, Alfred," she said slowly. "Yes, that's a very good idea, indeed! . . . Do come over and sit down beside me—I can't even see you where you are."

He got up and marched awkwardly over, dislodging the cat as he sat down. She had turned her face away, but looking earnestly at her profile he noticed that her make-up had somehow been heightened this evening and he was conscious of the scent she was wearing. All at once she slowly faced him. There was a cryptic look in her delicate stare,

unfathomable except that it contained that challenge which is also a promise. Alfred faltered confusedly:

"Look—you haven't changed your mind about Louis Hartzheim!"

The faintest inclination of her head carried the suggestion of a nod, accompanied also by the faintest smile.

"Myra!" Alfred burst out confusedly.

Her voice rode out on a low, excitingly shaken laugh.

"You don't think I'd ever let anyone like you get away from me now, do you? Poor Alfred, you haven't got a chance!"

Incredulous still, incapable still of believing that what he so intensely desired was really happening, Zacharias heard himself wildly interposing objections as though warning her and trying to stop her.

"But your father!" he exclaimed in a kind of bleat. "He'll never stand for it! He'll——"

She made a faint, contemptuous gesture. "He'll have to," she said. "Besides, he knows I always know what I'm doing!"

As though to test this bewildering gift of fortune, and as though also, if it were true, to taste his satisfactions to the full, he now in a harsh voice asked her to kiss him like an Eastern master ordering a slave to administer to his pleasure. She yielded at once as though in a simple obedience, her lips making a moist, warm cup against his in invitation and submission. And though this submission declared, too, she was only obeying because she herself chose to do so, and making a game of pretending that he was her master in the generous willingness to please him, he drank in the splendour of an instant without flaws, and a sigh of long-endured suffering went out of him at last, like the peace of a desired death.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

ADAM RETURNED FROM New York on the train with Antoinette and the baby, who had been dutifully christened Ralph.

The memory of his almost disastrous night with Julian Gamble had faded into bearable proportions in his mind, leaving him only a sense of something nauseating that could be forgotten.

Now, as they drew nearer Orion Mills, he found himself eager to be there.

The train pulled in at the end of a sombre Autumn day. After New York the small town seemed innocent and friendly. People smiled broadly at the station, halted Antoinette to peer at the infant, and uttered awkward welcomes, so that the short distance to the big shabby house took a good deal of time like a small triumphal procession. And immediately there were a hundred things to do, the phone rang steadily, and a stream of callers began to appear.

The first Sunday after his return dawned clear and cold. Adam entered his church and stood upon the platform, looking down upon his congregation. As his glance ran swiftly over the faces, ran nervously as though his anxious, searching eyes were making the most blatant confession, a kind of dropping of the heart, an experiencing of the most profound emptiness and disappointment, passed through him. He was startled as by an act of self-treachery. For why had he imagined that Louise Vinzant would be there, and why had he not guessed that he had been looking forward all along to nothing but seeing her?

He was smitten with a feeling of hideous weakness as the appalling realization came over him.

He was in love with her! He had been in love with her since he had first seen her, and had thereafter concealed that knowledge from himself with the most diligent care.

He had known, of course, that she had been interested in him, excited even. But he had assured himself that that was no more than the natural result of her nearly solitary

existence and extreme youth. Heaven knew how he had managed to prevent himself from admitting that he had been powerfully attracted in turn! But it was now at the supposition that she had not, after all, fallen in love with him in the least, that he was forced to face the fact that he had fallen in love with her.

He got through his services like an automaton. Returning home, he stared blankly at Antoinette across the dinner table, wondering how he had ever imagined even his tenderest feelings for her had had the strength of a passion. Not any more did he imagine that, confronted with a longing that was at once more simple and more bewildering, that was full of astonishing contradictions and perplexed him with the fierceness of its hunger and dread.

He heard the baby wailing and saw Antoinette rise and go. Adam stared down in a kind of horror at his plate. What was he thinking about to consider these wild thoughts! He must get away! He must leave Orion Mills the moment it could be managed. His desire for flight was filled with panic.

For the next three days he thought of nearly nothing else. But where was he to go, and how? Meanwhile Antoinette's calm eyes surveyed him with a prescience that suggested a kind of absurd genius who was at the same time a defective, full of profound thoughts yet incapable of saying a word of them that was not gibberish. And on the evening of that day, she suddenly suggested in the midst of maddening irrelevancies that they ought to pray that Mr. Lutrell's memory would be refreshed, and that God, acting through him, should summon Adam to the city of Marathon.

Adam looked at her rather crazily, but he was so desperate he saw nothing immediately preposterous in the suggestion; and as across the heaped disorder of the room he saw Antoinette fold her hands and close her benign eyes, he at once proceeded to do the same.

But the moment his own eyes were closed, his head spun around with the most turbulent and protesting thoughts, in

which there was no room for any prayer. He held himself stiffly with an effect of listening, while he considered that a little way off Antoinette was beseeching God for their miserable, tiny advancement as if there were something perfectly deserving about such an ignoble request. The folly of supposing it could be granted! He felt a kind of fury toward her, and his thoughts in full rebellion defiantly turned to the dark, foreign-looking girl, and he prayed in cynical recklessness only that he might some time see her again.

With a shocked feeling he broke off, and opening his eyes saw Antoinette, now finished, peering at him with the detachment of a pure scientist. He suddenly blushed scarlet, muttered some inarticulate, nonsensical excuse, and getting up with angry dignity, stalked up to his room, shut the door stealthily like a miser about to examine a hidden hoard, and sat down there in the dark with his tormented thoughts.

All that afternoon it had been snowing, the first, unstable snow of the season. Gazing blankly through his window, Adam could make out the white, laden branches of the trees swaying in the wind, and millions of descending flakes reflected in a patch of brightness from a street lamp. He stared there and into the suggestive density beyond. The swelling pupils of his eyes began presently to make out a few shapes in that darkness—a shed, an old elm tree, an abandoned car towering high under its cap of snow. Suddenly a kind of galvanic jerk projected his head sharply forward, with the look of dangerous alertness of a hunting animal. There had been a brief detachment of shadows there beside that old car that could only mean human movement, life.

In an instant, without knowing how he knew, without knowing what he was about, he had sprung to his feet, with a sense of extraordinary vigour and excitement. He hurried downstairs, threw on his coat, and said to Antoinette, in so cool a tone that he was even surprised at his control, that he wanted a little air, he was going out for a short walk by himself in the snow.

He let himself out, and then turned abruptly and picked his way around the rear of the house. The moist snow fell softly, daubing his eyelids, chin, and cheeks. The world was mysteriously still, except for a low wind rising and falling with a sound like helplessness.

Feeling his way forward cautiously, he now approached the shed, and then by a circuitous route came around to the back of the abandoned car. The next instant he saw her with her back toward him, still looking up at his window. An unbalanced laugh rose in his throat and was with difficulty repressed. Then advancing closer still, he softly said her name.

She spun round with a gasp, looked for a moment as if she meant to run, then stood as though accepting the inevitability, and perhaps the necessity, of capture. Impelled by an unutterable recklessness, by an indifference to whatever price should be exacted, Adam at once put his arms around her and kissed her.

She shivered, then grew quiet. There was a peculiar feeling of weakness emanating from her. Adam made out her solemn eyes fastened upon him in the darkness.

His faculties were now in the wildest turmoil, yet at the same time he felt extraordinarily soothed, contained, and powerful. He had come out like this with an effect of stalking her, and his impulse had been mixed with a peculiar, breathless fear. What this was about he did not wish to let himself know, lest it should check him. He had supposed himself driven by a desire to bring out into the open the fact that he loved her, and then, fortified by this release, to say good-bye. But he had not suspected that he wished so simply to kiss her. And the perception of where his fear sprang from now stole through him in the terrifying realization that he could not say good-bye, that his act was not an act of finality, but rather a dreadful act of beginning.

Give her up with a sentimental farewell? How could he! For she seemed to suggest a hazy yet intoxicating vista in

which there was no diminution of ecstasy, in which calmness itself was ecstatic.

Against this tumultuous and beating hope, he struggled to control himself in the pale, imploring name of reason, while with the utmost indifference he welcomed all obstacles. And the suicidal exaltation of this moment, which like death reduced all other moments to littleness and meaninglessness, was accompanied also by the awareness that Louise had not had for him an adolescent's passing infatuation, but a passion that equalled his own in strength and profound patience, and that she had already given herself to him in ways beyond his comprehension.

So it burst from him now, in a voice shaken by its own rashness, by its defiance nearly of sanity: the declaration that they must go away together at once, abandoning everything else, forfeiting scornfully everything else, and asking for nothing but each other.

And the wildness of this utterance, too, might have released him enough to have swung him back presently once more to sober reality had it not been that Louise immediately, trembling all over, exclaimed in a rapid whisper:

"No, no, no, no!"

Now he had no need of fighting so powerful a foe as himself, but only of overcoming her. He was conscious of the wet, feathery snow falling all around them in the enormous stillness. Deeply he smiled. The last feelings of prudence in him melted like the snow in his comprehension of Louise's helplessness. He was filled with the longing to make all things perfect for her, to make everything beautiful.

Holding her more firmly than ever, he silenced her from any further agitated protests by saying in a low voice that contained contradictory but inseparable emotions:

"We're going to go away together. Don't imagine I don't know exactly what I'm doing! You're not even to think . . . you're just to do as I say."

These words, poured out in an almost threatening manner,

seemed only to increase her distress. Her woebegone eyes explored his face, full of silent disbelief.

"Answer me!" he cried senselessly.

After a moment she said slowly: "You think now you mean what you say. But you don't realize. Let me just love you and go away! I will be all right."

Nothing could have been more calculated than her pitiful tone to fortify him in his resolve.

"You'd better believe me!" he cried. "You're going to do as I say!"

She raised her eyes slowly again, and seemed to struggle despairingly for a moment longer against her narrow experience, her instinct itself. Then she gave up all at once. She tried timidly to smile as if at last the only thing that was left to her was to please him.

"I'll believe you, if you want me to," she said.

Suddenly she came forward. Her mouth, damp with snow, did no more than brush his cheek. The impression passed like light, scarcely leaving a trace upon his consciousness. And instantly she released herself, slipped away, and turned once to wave quickly. Then the snow and the darkness swallowed her up, and Adam stood alone in the lonely universe, wondering what he had done.

For a little longer he waited where he was, his head dropped forward and his arms hanging as still as weights. A feeling of terror made his brain spin around. He would not examine what was before him—not yet; it was enough to exult in the disordered ecstasy that accompanied the thought of his possession of her. And now he began slowly to retrace his footsteps to the house.

His face, he suddenly reflected, in a recognition of the first of a scarcely endurable future series of ignominious precautions, concealments and denials, must be completely revealing. How was he to keep Antoinette from finding out at once? For he could not immediately be honest; he must have time to make all his preparations.

As he now entered the house with the quietness of guilt,

he saw that Antoinette was impatiently waiting for him, and that her face carried some excitement of her own which had the result of blinding her to his.

"You hadn't been gone a minute," she exclaimed in a tone that was rapid for her, "before the phone rang! I went to the door, you know, but I couldn't see you anywhere down the street. It will be next Sunday. He said, though, he'd like you to come right away to meet the board. Of course he apologized for being so abrupt, but then what with one thing and another, and being so busy, you know, he didn't want—that is, he felt it was the best way really——"

"What are you talking about?" Adam bewilderedly demanded. "I don't understand what you're trying to tell me."

"About our prayer, of course. It was answered, as I knew it would be. Mr. Lutrell called up and wants you to come to Marathon immediately."

He left early next morning. He left because he did not know what else to do. During most of a tormented and wakeful night an exultant pride that had a kind of drunken quality was mingled with other considerations from which his thoughts sprang away in terror.

What was he to do? How could he possibly go to Marathon now? It occurred to him once that he could pretend to Antoinette that he was ill, and have her wire Lutrell. He saw himself in bed, the shades drawn, the doctor taking his pulse and finding it quite irregular enough to suit him. But there was something ridiculous about such an imposture. And he probably could not sustain it if he tried. No; he would have to go. He would have to go because he could not immediately precipitate the upheaval of circumstances that his announcement must bring. He must think out carefully in advance what arrangements to make for Antoinette and the baby, how he was to spare his mother a deathblow, and how he was to sever cleanly and bravely nearly the most important relationship of all, the sincere if confused relation-

ship between himself and his profession as a clergyman. He would have to have all plans ready, and timed for split-second escape like an assassin with a bomb beneath his coat. For he would want to go away immediately afterward with Louise, and furthermore know just where he was going and what he meant to do there. Also, he would have to get a divorce, of course. A divorce! The word sent a chill down the spine of his Puritan upbringing. He had not fully realized before how formidable a place was the world. He began to think very hard about Louise and her beauty.

All at once, through his tossings and mournful anxieties, it occurred to him that he could go to Marathon with the deliberate intention of failing! He could convince Jennings Lutrell that he had made a wild mistake by preaching a miserably inadequate sermon, and be sent home with embarrassed thanks. That would not be so hard a thing to do, for how could he preach well, knowing himself a liar? And in Marathon he would be able to think all things out minutely, and come home with his bombshell ready in his hand.

This decision comforted him; worn out, he slept at last, and was with difficulty awakened in the morning and informed what life demanded of him this day.

He dressed hastily. Fortunately the train was late, and at the station he managed to write and mail a brief note to Louise explaining his sudden departure and telling her that he would be back in exactly four days. Meanwhile she was not to worry, but simply to leave everything confidently to him.

Not a word of love was in this letter; almost it might have seemed curt to someone not in the secret, or meanly self-protective to someone who was. But the surging feelings with which he set down each awkward word made him certain that they must beat and quiver in her also, as though the little scratchings on the paper there were alive and had their special electrical energy to discharge.

And on the train, longing to be rid of the sense of dire

ordeals ahead, he solaced himself for his bad night by thinking solely of Louise herself, and not of the desperate problems she presented. He suddenly could scarcely remember what she looked like, indeed he could not see her except in a haze, an evocation beyond the province of the five senses. She came to him mysteriously, like a colour, floated before him, not walked, in the limitless perfections of a spirit.

It was like being awakened with a slap to find himself confronted with the realistic, well-fleshed casement of Jennings Lutrell at the Marathon station. Lutrell, as crude and jolly and cocksure as Adam remembered him, called him "Reverend" at once, and whisked him off in a shiny car to a big, square house of gray stone on the city's principal residential street. On the way he explained in his aggressively affable voice that he had asked Adam to arrive several days in advance of the services he was to conduct in order to meet the chief members of the congregation and the trustees of the church.

And though it was clear he had private hopes for his own discovery, he showed that he meant to protect himself from disappointment by belittling the entire visit, as if it were no more than a mere courtesy interchange, and had no other significance.

Adam tried to assure himself he was contented with this, but was at the same time mysteriously ruffled. Gazing ahead of him with a grim look, he considered with bewildered feelings how he had hankered so longingly after this very chance, and now that it had come, was possessed by exactly the opposite emotions.

Mr. Lutrell's large house, from the instant of Adam's arrival, became the setting for luncheons, teas, dinners, and all sorts of intermediate meetings.

Although Adam had solemnly made up his mind to preach the most inept sermon possible when the time came, he had not gone so far as to determine to act any differently, and he did not cease to be likable.

And, perhaps, there was now added to this the shadow

of he unexpected cataclysm that had only just come into his life, and had defiantly arrayed a pure emotion against the code of social conduct. This, too, in some obscure way must have made itself felt, with the romantic suggestions of an immense and tragic secret.

In any event, before he had been in Mr. Lutrell's house twenty-four hours, Adam discovered, with a mixture of ludicrous dismay and ashamed pleasure, that he had made the most extraordinary personal success possible. He overheard one elderly lady, wealthy and influential, whisper almost fiercely to another that he was a darling, as if daring anyone to deny that. Young girls, making their eyes as big as possible, fastened these upon his face with intimations of which they themselves could scarcely be aware. The angular choir leader, snatching him as ruthlessly as a purse, got him to herself and then poured out some crazy, muddled confession of a dead love affair which it was plain she had confided in no one else. He could not make out what she was talking about.

And disturbing, but swift, there passed across his mind the thought of what influence he might have wielded here, and how necessary he could have become to them. That, too, was a gift he would make instead to Louise.

So it was the next day when he stood at last in the pulpit looking down, and saw looking up all those faces in which the brightest expectations glowed, that he knew his grotesque determination had become a thousand times harder.

He would try, he said to himself, with an effect of gritting his teeth. He had chosen the parable of the woman taken in adultery upon which to utter some platitudes about tolerance. And in this instant it suddenly occurred to him, like some painful, perverse obsession, to wonder what would happen if, instead of the stale sermon he meant to blunder through, he announced before them all his calm plan to desert his wife and child and run away with a very young girl. What would they think, if they believed him, if they did not suppose him insane? Only, probably, that this was one

more sordid and repellent incident, of the sort that were occasionally dished up in the more sensational newspapers with words like "love nest" connoting the disgusting cheapness of all such matters.

A feeling of anguish passed through him, a desperate wish to defend himself and Louise. Could not those here understand how this might have happened to anyone, to themselves, too? The feeling went on burning in him, so that as he began to speak his voice contained clearly the longing that was his justification and the ecstasy that was his love. He was not even aware of what he was saying, but he saw that they were listening, very tense and still. He pleaded for the sinner of the parable as though it were for himself he pleaded. When he was through, he was frightened, as though he had actually exposed his secret. Then with a start, he perceived that he had once more done the opposite of what he had intended. About his wretched triumph there was not any doubt at all. He had made a tremendous sensation. Men looked down solemnly; the faces of women glowed. It was as if they did not know what they had done to deserve this inspired man of God who had mysteriously come among them.

When the services were over, Adam felt he could not endure his position here a moment longer. He saw Jennings Lutrell glancing all about, and demanding credit for his amazing discovery with nods and smirks. Lutrell looked as if with difficulty he were restraining himself from lifting Adam's hands above his head like the hands of a victorious boxer.

Adam could think only of escape, and this nervous anxiety was increased when, after dinner that afternoon, Lutrell, brushing aside the need of even saying anything about how acceptable Adam was, took him into his study and got down to business with the greatest relish. As he listened uncomfortably to jubilant details about his salary, the secure financial position of the church, and the setting of the date when he was to return here as its formal incumbent, Adam

was seized by a mixture of weakness and horror, and could only gaze wildly at the door.

He cut Lutrell short with tactless abruptness, saying that perhaps they could discuss all this another time. In the other's eyes he could now do no wrong, and Lutrell at once set down Adam's impatience as an indication of his admirable unworldliness.

"Don't you worry, Reverend!" he exclaimed. "You just leave all those things to me! All you've got to do is talk—and be yourself. That's plenty good enough for us, I can tell you!"

Adam muttered distractedly something about wishing to return home as soon as possible. Lutrell said it was wonderful these days to see a man so devoted to his family, and drove him to the station in time to catch the afternoon train.

And alone upon it, with the feeling of having perpetrated some rascally imposition in which there had not even been the relief of cynical humour, but only a kind of madness, Adam made up his mind to be done with any further such traps immediately. He had not furthered his plans for the future an inch since he had been gone, he had not had time; but no matter, he would tell Antoinette point-blank tonight and let all his actions thereafter spring from circumstance and impulse. And then he and Louise, after this one abhorrent wrench, would be free, would be together, and nothing would matter any more.

When at length he reached Orion Mills and entered his house, Antoinette's glance, merely flickering over him once with its unchanged vagueness, appeared to satisfy her immediately about the only thing she wished to know. Without even asking him, she seemed to perceive that he had succeeded in Marathon and that the church was his.

She now set some warmed-up food in front of him, and relieved him of the necessity of talking by talking herself in her slow, unruffled way about things that did not even reach his consciousness. But as he bent his eyes over his plate and mournfully went on eating, some disconnected phrases

of hers detached themselves to penetrate finally his hearing.

He looked quite worn out, she was saying. A vacation would do him good. He could easily be spared in Orion Mills, and it might be a long while before he might have another change. Why didn't he take a real vacation, just by himself, right now? Those West Indian cruises were very improving; Uncle Ralph had gone on one some time back, and had always spoken of it most highly.

Adam lifted his head slowly and confronted her. The random suggestion was like a blow upon his nerves.

For at the immediate relief that had surged through him, his desperate eagerness to do just that, he was unable to conceal from himself any further his own miserable doubt.

The sweat jumped upon his palms; and in his forehead a big vein stood out as prominently as a brand. He was frightened. He was suddenly more frightened of what he had been contemplating than he had been on the *K-13* itself.

It was not the world which mattered, not Marathon, not even Antoinette: they would forget him soon enough, or right themselves soon enough. Even what his intention might do to his mother had previously been dismissed by the necessity and importance of it. And he was certainly unconcerned with any conceivable harm he might do himself. But before the betrayal of his faith, his mind reeled back in terrified protest. He could not, after all, deny God.

Against this consideration, which he had now realized fully for the first time, there weighed the truth of his profound love. The scale shifted up and down delicately as though a feather on either side might settle it. The feather fell: he imagined Louise in the snow once more, heard her rejection of his madness, and beheld himself once more overcoming her. She had been right, she had been right! They had been doomed from the start.

If only he had not gone to her that night, if only he had not surrendered to his harassed nerves, if only he had then been strong, not weak!

And with that passionate regret, he knew his decision

was made, and he faced a sacrifice about which there could be no more hesitation. He would write her tonight and tell her what she herself had known from the first—it would need few words.

In the midst of all the unhappy thoughts that had been rushing pellmell through him, Adam was at last aware of Antoinette's eyes resting studiously and dispassionately upon him. Their glances suddenly locked in one of those moments that hold a lightning disregard of all the simulations of good will by which any relationship is maintained.

Adam suddenly had the disturbed feeling that Antoinette somehow knew everything, even what he had been thinking about. But of course that could not be so! Then the moment was gone, and he managed to say in a surprisingly level voice that he thought the suggestion an excellent one. Moreover, he would go immediately. There were always ships of one sort or another sailing from New York these days. Yes, he would go tomorrow. Tomorrow in the morning.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

FOR MOST OF the short voyage he hung over the rail of the cruise liner, staring at the wake that undulated far away. He appeared to be measuring this with scientific care. He saw the figures of the other passengers as through a mist. He wandered among them like a courteous ghost, speaking to no one and chilling acquaintanceship by his withdrawn, solitary manner: the young girls on board who had an air of taking pleasure by the throat and strangling it with squeals of pretended delight; the old couples dismally attempting too late to find pleasure in the disruption of lifelong habits; the deeply considering honeymooners; and the drinkers of different varieties engaged in escaping from the rigours of prohibition.

But on the morning before they were to make their first port, one man thrust himself upon Adam. He made bursting declarations about nothing in a voice that had a truculent ring. Still it was perfectly clear that he was altogether good-natured, and that his large body held a large spirit, too. Presently, Adam learned that his companion was the ship's doctor and that his name was Galbraith.

Asking questions so blunt that it was somehow impossible to take offence, Galbraith forced Adam to declare that he had come away to be utterly alone for a little while.

Galbraith looked at him shrewdly and guessed he was in some sort of trouble. He at once, as if taking upon himself the advice and direction of the entire world, assured Adam he ought to quit the ship at this first port this afternoon. From there he could hire a car to take him ten miles up the coast to a sleepy, really untouched village named San Tomas that had a fair native hotel and the most beautiful beach in the world. He wouldn't be bothered there, and he could wait until it was time to pick up the boat, or one of its sister ships, for the return trip.

Adam took up the suggestion indifferently. Perhaps he would be able to stop thinking there. Then Galbraith suggested he come to his cabin and he would show him the place on a map.

For some time, in the cabin that was fitted with many shelves and bottles in racks, Galbraith talked buoyantly and irrelevantly. The only meaning of his utterance seemed to lie in the cheerfulness of its sound. He happened, however, to say something about being much in Boston, from which the small steamer began its shuttling cruise, and Adam could not resist the inevitable inquiry as to whether Galbraith by any chance knew another doctor there, a friend of his named Giles.

Galbraith's mouth fell open. "You know Giles?"

"We were in the war together."

They both stared at each other, struck by the familiar wonder at a mutual tie.

"Then you know Nelly, too, of course!" Galbraith said.

"Nelly? Is he married?"

"No, no, his mother. Wonderful little woman—great sense of humour!"

"Oh," said Adam. "I never met her. And, as a matter of fact, I haven't heard from him in a long time. Have you seen him recently?"

"Left him only last Thursday. I look him up every trip."

Suddenly Galbraith scowled and shook his head.

"There's no handling a fellow like that," he said disgustedly. "He won't even listen to sense."

"What's the matter? Is he in trouble?"

"Trouble!" Galbraith echoed, his big face swelling. "He's head over heels in debt, that's what, and not a penny coming in! He owes for a lot of fancy equipment, and pays rent on an office big as a barn. One of these days I'm going to try to make him turn all that stuff in and get him out of there if I can. But he won't listen to reason—probably have to fight him before I get through! Besides, I'm damned if I know what to tell him to do."

His expression slumped into a gloomy cast. He made a gesture of dismissal or repugnance, as though not wishing to pursue a subject which was filled with an almost painful discomfort. Adam, too, sat silent.

San Tomas was all that Galbraith had claimed for it. The small hotel in which Adam had a room had the appearance of having served some ancient time or other as a fort. It was still, and full of cool shadows. Down its limestone walls were cracks from which bright-coloured lizards suddenly appeared, as if dabbed there by an invisible brush. Each morning Adam ate a breakfast of a bowl of milky coffee, and bread smeared with nearly liquid Danish butter out of a tin. As he slowly ate he would see the thin Negro who was always monotonously sweeping here, and who turned now and then to fling some insult or obscure joke at the

unseen inhabitants of the kitchen in a rattling Spanish that sounded like weak machine-gun fire.

Afterwards Adam would wander gravely about the town while it was still cool. The houses had once been painted in bright colours, but these had now faded to pastel hues. As it neared noon it grew hotter and hotter. When he had lunched he lay down on his narrow bed under the triple mosquito canopy and dozed. Then all the town was vanished and silent until the sun began to go down.

In this nearly lifeless atmosphere Adam moved as though lulled by a drug. He scarcely thought of anything with much vividness, not even Louise now, and he seemed simply to be waiting for time to pass in a place where time scarcely existed.

On his last day here, before returning to the principal port and catching there one of the sister ships of the line home, he made his way for the first time to the beach that Galbraith had spoken about so enthusiastically. But it was quite a long jaunt, and Adam had scarcely had the interest before to explore that far.

The hot road ended as if chopped off with an axe. Beyond, an overgrown path disappeared into livid undergrowth. Adam pushed on through. No one seemed to have passed this way for a long time. But all at once the path, as dark as the entrance to a catacomb, burst from its black-and-emerald tangles and gave access to a fan-shaped clump of palm trees growing upon open ground. Below these was a great shelf of sand that glittered with whiteness, and at its edge could be seen the water of a diminutive bay.

Adam moved forward, his eyes narrowed against the stabbing sun. Galbraith was right: it was remarkably beautiful, though it was difficult to say by what subtleties its superiority was manifested. It suggested in its dance of colours a kind of fairyland. He paced slowly down to the water's edge. No living thing was to be seen anywhere. In this excessive desolation there was the excitement of a seething violence. Yet there was great peace here also.

Adam stood looking out fixedly upon the gaudy blankness. His eyes took in everything in a penetrating scrutiny, and reported everything to some division of his brain which had no echo of consciousness.

So it was that seeing everything he also saw nothing. He was thus not actually aware of something focused by his retina with the sharpest of perceptions. In one sense he could not have been said to have observed, very close to the shore, the shadow of a huge man-eating shark balancing itself delicately in the translucent, shallow water. Its sleek, carved body had exactly the suggestion of a submerged submarine. He turned away to retrace his course to the cool shelter of the hotel, not knowing what he had looked at. Yet the monstrous image had nevertheless entered his brain and festered there.

It was a sharp, cold twilight when Adam stepped down from the incoming train at Orion Mills a week later. The wooden platform, streaked with thin snow, squeaked under his footsteps. The station agent, pushing the station express truck, stopped to greet him with surprise.

"Hello there! Well, well, Mr. Mallory! Didn't know you were due back today. How'd you enjoy your trip?"

The agent, detaining him in spite of the cold, began to tell him the events that had happened since he had been away. Adam stood uncomfortably, trying to escape and scarcely listening. A house had been burned down; the postmaster had broken his leg stepping off his porch; the State, it was rumoured, was going to put a big highway through. And there had been a suicide, a girl up on one of the back farms—crazy, probably. Drowned herself. Yes, she had been found drowned in a pond right near her place during the thaw. She was that Vinzant girl, old Mrs. Vinzant's granddaughter.

Adam, except for a slight start as a man might make at the instant of a bullet's impact, gave no sign of shock. He

stared rather stupidly, then pushed up the slight incline to the street. Here he was halted and had his hand vigorously shaken by a red-faced farmer whom he knew. The farmer leaned confidentially forward. Adam tried not to hear, and he succeeded until the final words:

"Still, we ain't had a suicide around here for ten years, I guess!"

Adam moved on. Suddenly he almost collided with Miss Purdy, who ran the town library on the one day each week it was open.

"Why, Mr. Mallory! Have you just got back? Well, I can tell you some terrible things have happened around here since you've been away!"

"I know," said Adam hoarsely. "Yes, I know all about it——"

He left her standing there staring after him.

In his ears there now seemed to be clattering and roaring a million-tongued voice exulting in human pain. But he had not yet believed, he had not yet allowed himself to realize, and he fled up the steps of his house as if hurrying for sanctuary.

He was glad that no one had heard him enter. From somewhere in the rear of the house he caught the sound of the baby wailing. Setting down his bag, he went as quietly as possible up the stairs to his study. He dropped down in his chair. His haggard eyes sought the window. A little daylight still hovered. It had a garish hue. He gazed stiffly at the hazy outlines of a shed, an old elm tree just beyond it, and still farther on, the bulk of a rusting abandoned car. They had a singularly deserted look.

Just then he heard his door open. He turned and with an effect of hallucination saw Antoinette, as if from a great distance away, slowly coming towards him.

At the sight of her his self-control was shattered at last. He sprang to his feet, crying out crazily:

"I killed her! I killed her!"

Antoinette said, "Hush," very softly, without any criticism

in her bland voice. There was something magnificently stoical in her air, so that you saw she would one day die with dignity.

Adam buried his face in his hands without the least concealment. He began to sob. She put her arms around him. At last the broken noises in his throat died down. He dropped his head on her shoulder like a child. Her hand caressed his hair and she made a soothing sound. So for a little space they stood together, clasped like lovers.

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PART III

1939

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CHAPTER THIRTY

THE SPRING DAY came up out of darkness with fineness and expectancy. But the light that was so alive with the freshness of the morning could pierce only faintly the streaked and filthy windows of the place where Will Giles lay sleeping. It was a large, disused loft in a murky building which hung over the rim of Boston Harbour. About its stillness and abandoned barrenness there was a feeling of dull despair.

Yet Giles, stretched out upon a broken-down cot, appeared to be resting quite peacefully. There was a square, unpainted table at his side, on which stood some thick crockery and several quite tall piles of books in cheap purple bindings. Most of them had abstruse titles: *Keys to Karma*; *Truths from the Outer Path*; *Star-Wisdom of Master Gerontius*; *Spirit Revelations of Bertha M. Buss*; *Petals from a Mystic Rose*. Some of them appeared to be a kind of metaphysical poetry. And one and all instantly proclaimed their denial of any existence that is ascertained through the senses.

In the immense, dingy loft that had probably once been used as a storehouse for produce, the few other furnishings seemed lost. There were several straight chairs with unsteady legs or broken cane seats. There was a larger Morris chair in which at present another man, with his shoes off and his collar unbuttoned, but with his hat clapped firmly forward on his head, was also sleeping. And back of a torn paper screen, on top of a careful arrangement of coats and sacking that had been spread upon the floor, lay still another sleeper.

Giles stirred and shifted his arm. With the unhurried pace of someone who has nothing to get up for, he advanced step by step into consciousness. He sat up gradually, and opening his eyes, looked gravely around the dismal room.

It was astonishing how little he had changed after nearly twenty years. Even in his late middle-age there was something guileless still about his small, snub nose, and bland, ingratiating eyes. Only his hair was thinner and his shoulders seemed bent slightly together in an expression of frailty or

fading vitality. But the skin drawn so tightly across his cheekbones, like canvas over the ridges of a tent pole, had a peculiar luminous transparency. There was something painful about this delicacy, like a disease. He did not look at all like other men. There was a great purity about his expression, like the expression of a saint who had deliberately sacrificed awareness for goodness. You saw at once that this was so. An impersonation, an attitude, a habit of humility and self-mortification, that had begun at first only as an expression of fear and vanity, had gradually eaten into his core: he had become his own pretence.

He got out of bed, took off a pair of faded pyjamas, folded them neatly, and began to dress. His clothes, too, were neat, but shiny with age. They made a shabby parody of genteelness and respectability.

As he dressed, his mind was occupied gently and agreeably with the recollection of last night's meeting. He had been uplifted there as always by a mild ecstasy, and refortified. Now, for a little while, disagreeable things would have very little power to irritate or disturb him, such things as the letter yesterday from the owners of this loft (who charged him only ten dollars a month for its occupancy) reminding him caustically that for the past three months they had received exactly nothing. He could look upon all such matters with that smile that declared their utter insignificance, that even denied their existence, and so was better than action, better than courage.

The meetings were nearly always the same. This time Dr. Ananda had addressed them: the handful of rather dowdy-looking people sitting on the hard-backed folding chairs before the little platform. With his toneless, sepia eyes and his Oriental accent, Dr. Ananda had spoken of those Ascended Masters who were now watching with sad calm, from their hidden and inaccessible retreats in the Himalayas, the slow development of the mystic mind. They could not communicate their wisdom, Dr. Ananda asserted, since all men had to seek and find the truth for themselves, and had

to suffer the countless births and rebirths of many material lives before they attained even the lowest plane of the neophyte and were ready to receive instruction.

After the lecture and the reading of various poems there had been a general discussion. The meeting broke up slowly. Everyone beamed on everyone like the members of a strange, exclusive club. Will had lingered to talk to Mrs. Lora, the stout, genial widow, who liked him and now and then had him up to her old, comfortable house for a meal and a long, earnest chat which was never intelligible but always delighted both of them. Mrs. Lora was well-off: it was she who paid the principal part of Dr. Ananda's fee, and often the entire rental of the hall by herself. Then Miss Webb, in her long, flowing gown that suggested a seeress, had sidled up to them with her mysterious smile. She never said anything in the least remarkable, but seemed always to be on the point of doing so. Will talked fluently and even authoritatively, and the two women listened to him with respect, saying occasionally with sage nods, "That's very true," or "Yes, Dr. Will, absolutely!"

Afterwards Marc de Zorilla had walked excitedly part way home with him from the meeting. Marc de Zorilla was nearly always excited. He waved his arms and talked so rapidly that a little stream of spray discharged itself from his fat lips. His face was round as a ball, but it had a tortured expression that was incongruous in this plump pinkness. It was impossible to say what his nationality had originally been, in spite of his name. One guessed his life had been one of vicissitudes and much anguish, the reward of those in whom an excessive emotionalism is accompanied by only the feeblest sort of brains.

But now he had an idea. He could only splutter about how magnificent it was. He told Giles he would come to see him about it in the morning. It was wonderful: it was glorious; it was, above all, certain! It would have to be done! And they would all make a fortune out of it!

Giles, his head lifted to the stars of the sweet Spring night,

had listened with dim courtesy. It was as though he moved surrounded by some very hard but perfectly transparent substance through which the loudest sounds and events penetrated with difficulty, and presented themselves, when they had done so, only as faint murmurs and inconsequential dreams.

Recalling the pleasant evening now with a vagueness which was itself a pleasure, he went over to a rusty iron sink in one corner of the loft and commenced to shave. Though he moved quietly, the splashing of the water from the single tap finally awakened one of his two companions.

This was the man who had been occupying the floor behind the privacy of the screen. He was in his early thirties, and in spite of his sharp face, his erratic-looking and derisive eyes made him appear still younger. His name was Arthur LaRue. Giles had first met him nearly two years ago, across the table of a third-rate cafeteria. They had recognized each other immediately as persons without any ordinary functions or employment, having nothing in common with most of humanity except the need for food and sleep, and thus having something peculiarly in common with each other. Giles had been struck with the younger man directly. Although there was something unscrupulous about LaRue, a disarming admission of this gave him the contradictory quality of seeming altogether honest. He plainly lived in the most precarious manner conceivable, while indulging in the largest and most pretentious theories.

Giles had persuaded him to accompany him to one of the theosophical meetings the next night, but though LaRue had assented unhesitatingly, he had nothing but angry jeers about it afterwards. Still, for some reason this attitude did not irritate Will. He smiled benignly, and told Arthur LaRue he was certainly on one of the lowest of all planes, and had before him the hard road of many gradually bettering transmigrations. Arthur attacked him scornfully, accusing him of nearly everything, including being crazy, but it was clear that there was no personal hostility in his

voice and that he did not even much care about what he was saying.

Giles, who at that time had just taken over the loft as a residence, had brought him home to argue further. Late one night shortly afterwards, LaRue, sneaking out of his own rooming house with a suitcase containing his entire belongings, took up his habitation with Will as a permanent guest.

He was at least an enlivening one. Nearly always in a sulk or a temper about everything, he took some of the deadness out of Will's life without making him pay any actual price for this. Though his history remained obscure, his personality was definite. He was, astonishingly for a derelict, very much of a dandy. On nails in the rough splinterful walls he had a variety of clothes always hanging which one way or another he invariably managed to secure. There were sport clothes and more formal clothes, outing shirts with huge lapels, silk scarves, a black Homburg hat, and whole rows of shoes. Nearly everything was somewhat cheap in taste, full of exaggerated points and shapings, but nearly everything was quite new. Many of them, of course, had never been paid for.

Giles' own early experiences of the shifts, arduous and involved, by which it is necessary to maintain existence in a condition of pauperism, were too ingrained in him to be obscured even by his mystical obsession; and he observed Arthur's ingenuities in this field with a connoisseur's appreciative relish. Every once in a while LaRue would make the rounds of the junk shops and the humblest sort of second-hand stores, and secure all he could buy of cheap, discarded objets d'art, such things as veined ormolu clocks, atrociously sentimental china figurines, and vile paintings in cumbrous gilt frames, together with laces, candle-sticks, lamps, embroidery, old books, and every sort of offensive knickknack. But practically all of these things were broken, soiled or unusable, and a good bargainer, he usually got them for very little. Afterwards he would repair what he could

or artfully conceal their defects, and then, with his collection complete or his money gone, he would start on a prowling hunt for a likely stranger, manage to fall into talk with him, and with an innocent air that asked nothing, tell some story of misfortune that was about to cause him to sell for practically nothing his treasured family possessions and heirlooms. If the stranger showed himself excited by greed and the dream of an easy bargain, it was a simple matter to invite him to have a look at these things. Once there, the wrenching despair of Arthur's expression at the thought of having to part with them often convinced the purchaser he had stumbled upon a find against the evidence of his own eyes.

But not all of Arthur's schemes were as safe as this. Now and then he took desperate chances that made him gnaw his nervous fingers in anxiety. And a dread of this kind was the first thing that assailed his thoughts as he awoke this morning. Some ten or twelve days ago he had cashed a check for twenty dollars with a Greek fruit pedlar he knew, drawn on a bank in which his account had shrunk to scarcely more than a dollar. Waiting for the three days for the check to be collected by the bank, he had then cashed another check for twenty-five dollars with an easygoing cigar-store proprietor, rushed to the bank and deposited twenty of it, and lived for three days on the remaining five. Three days later he was again compelled to raise the money to meet this last obligation, and had managed to cash a check for thirty dollars with still another unsuspecting businessman, in this case a tailor to whom he actually still owed money. Again he had deposited all of this but five dollars. Now that five dollars, too, was completely gone, and today he would have to find someone somewhere who would be willing to cash still another check for thirty-five.

This alarming consideration was accompanied by the dire certainty that he knew nowhere else he could go, or anyone whom he did know whom he had not bilked already. So his tenor voice had a rasping, indignant sound as he called out

to Will, who was washing the soap off his face at the sink: "Is there anything to eat here? Or is it too much to expect to have breakfast in this place?"

His demanding, contemptuous tone had exactly the quality of a shrew; but Will, reaching for a towel, only sent him the humble, pleading smile with which he indicated always his willingness to take upon himself the blame for everything. He said placatingly that he was sorry, there wasn't anything right now, and he was afraid he hadn't any money. But, he added hopefully, Mr. Perry was going to bring him some; he had promised it as long ago as last week. He added he had been expecting Mr. Perry all day yesterday. Perhaps he would come in with it this morning.

Mr. Perry, indeed, was now almost the only source of Will's income. He was an elderly Negro, very grave and dignified and impressive, whom Will had met almost a year ago in some theosophical group or other. Mr. Perry had introduced himself sonorously as Samuel Albemarle Perry, and after taking stock of Will's meekness had tentatively asked him whether he would be interested in treating medically a few coloured patients. Will said he would be glad to help anyone he could, of course; and Mr. Perry had nodded solemnly and shaken his hand in a dignified way, after jotting down his address in a big notebook.

A couple of weeks later, after Will had supposed that the incident had been entirely forgotten, his coloured acquaintance suddenly appeared and carried him off to his first coloured patients. There was much conscious pride in Mr. Perry's demeanour at thus producing a white doctor, and the flattery of Will's services seemed to do even the patient good. The fee he asked was trifling; and with satisfaction Mr. Perry promised to secure him still other cases. He was as good as his word. Though Will was often unable to diagnose properly some of the horrifying ailments that were exposed to him, and unable to be of much use when he could, he did his best. And perhaps his gentleness and compassion were not without their uses. Sometimes the fees he

received were even less than trifling, often there were no fees at all; and as time went on, Will could not conceal from himself that whenever anything was paid, Mr. Perry, usually whispered to in a rear room, was also being paid. But he had schooled himself long before this to make no criticism of anyone. They were learning, just as Dr. Ananda and all the other yogis and swamis said, and only they could teach themselves.

It had been nearly two weeks ago that he had last visited a patient, prescribing then for a coloured washwoman troubled by neuritis. She had promised to pay him something as soon as she could earn some money, and Mr. Perry had said he would fetch it down at once. It was the hope of this fee, which surely could not be large, which Will now held out as a lonely possibility to Arthur LaRue.

But Arthur emitted a snort of such exaggerated scorn that it was clearly only half felt. "Mr. Perry!" he cried. "He'll show up when he's good and ready—if he ever does. I sometimes think you're half cracked. No, really, I mean it! When I think of the nonsensical things you believe in and the things you do—it's disgusting to me, not funny, I assure you!"

Will laughed gently. He began to dry his face contentedly with the single frayed towel that hung on the rack.

Arthur's loud contemptuous tones had at last awakened the other occupant of the loft, the seedy man in the Morris chair. With a groan he pulled himself up and forward, swept his hat off, and scratched his head, with his eyes still shut.

The other two paused to look at him. He was a man in his forties, with a dissipated face, as pointed as a wedge. There was something depraved about his aspect. You saw that he asked no more of life, or of Paradise either, than to be able to haunt barrooms and brothels indefinitely. Yet he was clearly not an actual criminal type. He had, mutually with Giles and LaRue, only a lack of equipment for making his living, though in his case this was not due to eccentricity so much as so intrinsic baseness. His eyes had the rapacious, fixed look that may sometimes be seen in the eyes of a dog

on the streets of some south-European city, a look that accepts misery because it has never been cognizant of any other condition, and that is so far beyond ordinary emotion as simply to fear men dispassionately as agents of hunger and pain.

It was LaRue who had introduced him here a few weeks ago, taking him off a park bench one evening during a soaking drizzle. Will, of course, had had no objection to this; indeed, he cordially approved such benevolence. The man, who said his name was Jack Spate, evinced no particular gratitude or even much friendliness for their hospitality. He seldom spoke, but watched everything with his wolf's eyes, with the air of someone meaning to snatch instantly whatever crumbs fell his way and then spring back in time to avoid a blow. He had, indeed, plundered their small stock of supplies more than once when anything happened to be left over. But neither protested, for they knew without mentioning it that he would be gone soon; he would drift on, like a number of others not dissimilar from him, who had appeared mysteriously to stay with them for a while and then as mysteriously had vanished. Meanwhile, there was something vaguely consoling in the presence of someone who was even more abandoned, more hopeless and broken, than they were themselves.

Jack Spate got up, and without any greeting, began to slosh his face with cold water in the sink. Then he returned to his chair and with frowning eyes carefully proceeded to roll the remnants of some grains of tobacco into a cigarette. Arthur was now engaged in meticulously dressing himself. He emerged from this action with an appearance of cheap elegance like an actor in a second-rate vaudeville turn. And in order to put out of his head his disquieting uncertainty about the next check that he had to kite, he plunged at once into a venomous attack on Will.

Giles with his immaculate, pale face listened to bitter, nearly senseless reproaches as if with tenderness. He had just picked up one of the books on his bedside table, and it was

the sight of this that gave Arthur a suitable opening. "How long are you going to be taken in by such rubbish? I suppose you were with all the rest of those idiots last night? I think I'll write one of those books myself—it would be easy! They must make a lot of money, too, when there are plenty of fools like you around!"

Will's smile deepened. He said teasingly:

"Poor Arthur—what a lot you have to learn! Maybe it will take you a million years before you reach the cycle of understanding. As Dr. Ananda said last night . . ."

"Dr. Ananda!" Arthur cried violently. "Dr. Ananda!"

Will looked at him gently. He was not conscious of having baited his friend deliberately. Nevertheless, he welcomed these onslaughts which seemed so insensate and were unchecked by any hesitations in their attempts to deride. He welcomed them because he was safe from them, because they could not possibly reach him, and because they seemed to represent the contemptuous opposition of the world in a form from which he had nothing to fear. He emerged always victorious and soothed.

No, there was not much possibility that he could now be overthrown in the hazy convictions that had served as a lulling and even increasing anodyne for nearly twenty years. For he had long ago, when he had first embraced his mystical tenets, met a far more severe test of them than any that Arthur could offer, and met it triumphantly. It was Miss Bass, in that now almost forgotten time, who had provided it, and who tried to demolish the protective dream he had found for himself. But it had not been his dream that had then been demolished.

Yet that deadly conflict had come to a head quite slowly, as though proceeding hesitantly but inevitably, step by step. After the debacle of his fortunes in that period when he had driven George Galbraith away, and failed in his courage to beg a loan from Alfred Zacharias, everything in his life seemed violently overthrown.

Nevertheless, when all was said and done, it was far less appalling than the pictures presented in advance by his imagination.

Of course, they had all come down on him at once—the loan company, and the company that held title to the unpaid-for medical equipment which he had criminally sold, and his finally exasperated landlord. The company that owned the equipment merely repossessed it promptly from the young doctor to whom he had transferred it, and Giles, sick with embarrassment, and writhing under the contemptuous eyes of the man he had cheated, faltered out his promise to pay the debt off fully, if only he could be given a little time. Then the loan company proved surprisingly calm and logical. As he had nothing to attach, and their only chance of recouping their loss was to allow him to continue practice, they had put no obstacles in the way of this. It was the landlord who did that. He threatened Giles with an immediate dispossession action, demanded a three months' note for back rent with interest, and gave him twenty-four hours to be quit of the premises. As the phone had now been discontinued and the light was shut off, Giles could not very conveniently have stayed anyway. And once he was out, once he was shut of the office that had originally devoured him, he was aware of a gush of the most enormous relief. Almost he felt happy, and grudgingly in secret admitted that George Galbraith had been right about it from the first.

What was he going to do now? He hardly knew, but in the delicious release from all those wretched anxieties which he had been carrying about with him night and day for so long, he hardly cared. Anything would be agreeable, for he was free. He had enchanting anticipations of the most ordinary satisfactions, like a patient convalescing from a shattering operation and watching from his hospital window the people walking outside, actually walking without help, and at liberty to go wherever they chose!

However, there seemed to be only one thing actually open

to him, and though disliking intensely having to follow Galbraith's advice here also, he determined to look for some sort of medical staff or institutional appointment with a salary, since he could not possibly set up a new private practice anywhere, even in the humblest location.

He soon discovered that such appointments were rare to come by, were fought for desperately, and had long waiting lists of men whose qualifications made his own application seem the most futile and unlikely petition possible. It must have been a coincidence of the sheerest sort of good luck that had enabled Galbraith to stumble on something for him, that time, so quickly.

After two weeks of timid inquiry, two weeks of pretend-ly indifferent smiles, with which he jauntily thanked the people who rejected him in every conceivable fashion, often even with a curtness that was humiliating, he found himself one evening staring into the single closet of the tenement apartment, where in conjunction with a ragged broom, a dirty mop, and a torn umbrella, Maynard Spike's incomplete invention of a military rifle was slowly gathering dust. But there was no one to whom he could go with that! He did not know how to set about unearthing experts in such a recondite field. And, even if he did, he could not have explained the workings of the invention away. Besides, as there was still something wrong with it, what good was it showing it to anyone? And the enraged thought struck him that Maynard Spike had probably not employed a single penny of that money he had secured for him, at the price of his own ruin, on the further development of the gun, but had spent it all, every cent, upon himself and his horrible house.

However, in the same theosophical bookstore into which he had hurriedly stepped after his dismal return from New York, a lady had pointed out to him that life itself took revenge on evildoers, one did not have to do anything about it; the selfish were always paid back in their own coin eventually. So perhaps Spike would be sorry sometime or other.

Giles had visited the obscure bookstore on several occasions after that first time. He was not made uncomfortable by the feeling that he ought to buy something directly; and he made acquaintances with surprising ease among the steady habitués of the place. There was nothing especially freakish to be detected about most of them, and they had a commonplace, often a drab, aspect, and as a rule did not dress very well. But soon it could be perceived that though they argued ceaselessly with one another, they shared some mysterious similarity. It was hard to say what this was, except that they all had a taste for philosophy and religious speculation, and yet not much intelligence. When they learned that Giles was a doctor, they looked at him with suspicious interest, as if he were a sort of dangerous foe. Their voices grew aggressive, yet carried at the same time a note of uneasiness and insecurity. When they presently recognized his gentleness and sweetness, they seemed equally surprised and captivated.

Still at this stage the ideas they uttered had no meaning that Giles could make out. But he could not help but be affected by their warm interest in him and their anxiety to impress him, which said he had already impressed them. His vanity was sorely in need of some sort of admiration, and as he did not know where else to find it, he took to dropping in at the bookstore now and then, greeting the hangers-on with an uncritical smile, and so standing, with his head on one side, listening like an arbiter to the most solemnly uttered gibberish.

However, in this trying time the real source of his strength and courage was in Miss Emma Bass, who did not talk gibberish at all. Giles was perfectly willing to admit that he did not know what he would have done without her. Her unshakable cheerfulness, her heartening stoicism, had the most fortifying effect upon him, while her passionate loathing of his enemies brought a sentimental moisture to his eyes. She was always about the tenement now, whenever her hours at the library left her free, and she and Mrs. Giles

struck up a new compact that was full of the sincerest friendliness. She was their friend, that was what her attitude said, their friend against the world, and whatever she had was at their service. She never shrank from discussing the most sordid or unflattering problems, and she would listen patiently to the wildest suggestions, or wave off contemptuously the petty defeats that weighed Giles down. He looked at her gratefully, and decided that he must certainly be in love with this good woman.

And Miss Bass gave more than a sympathetic ear; often, under the pretence of making a casual or amusing gift, she arrived with packages of food on an evening in which they might otherwise have gone supperless; and as these offerings were always presented to his mother, Will did not feel uncomfortably obligated himself. Besides, was he not, in a way, engaged to her, and prepared to share his future with her, and so pay her back a thousandfold?

He was continuing without luck his ceaseless search for some medical appointment, any appointment at all, when one afternoon, returning dispiritedly after a day of rebuffs, he saw approaching him on the street a figure that had about it something puzzlingly familiar.

He started at the realization that the man in civilian clothes at whom he was peering was actually Lieutenant Brale, the former commander of the *K-13*. At the same instant Brale recognized him, too. To Will's astonishment he seemed altogether overjoyed at their encounter, and at once proposed a drink. They happened to be on a block of speakeasies, and they stepped into the first place at hand.

Brale ordered whiskey; getting it down in that hasty tell-tale way that reports the drinker grasping for alcohol without satisfactions, but in the hope of drugging himself as quickly as possible. There was no doubt of the fact that he had changed astonishingly. All his harsh arrogance was gone and an actual humility now exuded from him. He was so nervous that his hands and voice shook. Giles stared dum-

founded, for it was as if he found himself with a complete stranger who had somehow acquired Brale's face.

And worse still, Brale, after asking him what he was doing, suddenly and senselessly began to flatter him, saying what a wonderful thing it must be to be a doctor, and how enormously he envied him. As he spoke, a propitiating smile whipped on and off his face spasmodically, and his eyes, meeting Will's only for instant flashes, jumped away each time as if in panic. What could possibly have happened to him to have brought about a change so violent? It was by no means sufficiently explained when presently, in a loud voice accompanied by a weak laugh, Brale said that his wife had run away with an actor, and that he himself had resigned from the Navy some time ago. He was working for Dycer these days—yes, Hamilton Dycer, the ensign of the *K-13*; Giles remembered him, of course—who was now managing director of a chain of cheap magazines in New York.

"He's come a long way," said Brale wistfully. "Oh, he's a big shot now!"

He seemed to make out then that Giles was not going to offer him a return drink. Giles was so ashamed that he had not enough money in his pocket that he was ready to sink through the floor. But without resentment Brale asked if Giles minded if he had one himself and, not waiting for an answer, rapped at once upon the bar.

The second drink appeared to give him more confidence, though he remained as repellently anxious to please as before. And all at once he threw out the suggestion that Giles ought to do something for Dycer; he was looking for doctors to write some articles right now, and there was good money in it.

Giles said with a deprecating gesture that he hardly knew enough for that; he would not dream of attempting to write on medical subjects with so many eminent authorities in the field.

"Oh, it isn't that kind of thing he wants," Brale said

vaguely. "No, it's another angle entirely. You'd better run down to New York and have a talk with him. He'd be delighted to see you, I know. He's been wonderful to me, I can tell you!"

Giles said insincerely he would certainly think about it, and obsessed by a desire to escape, and feeling more and more depressed by the indications of Brale's unaccountably shattered spirit, he managed to excuse himself. Brale said he thought he would hang around where he was for a little while. He didn't get up to Boston very often, he was here only to see his sister. His eyes had the fixed intensity of someone who has made up his mind to get drunk. He shook Giles' hand warmly, and told him he would inform Dycer about their meeting and say that Giles would come down very shortly to see him.

There was a quality so painful about Brale's metamorphosis that Giles even dismissed his bewilderment about it to avoid thinking any further of the matter, and certainly he had no intention of taking up Brale's preposterous suggestion about writing medical articles.

He was therefore quite taken aback to receive a letter only a week later from Hamilton Dycer himself on crisp, engraved stationery, asking him to come to New York immediately. There was something tantalizing about this note, which by its very brevity suggested urgency and importance like a telegram. Nevertheless, Giles might have ignored it, or simply written a polite refusal, had he not just then been turned down for a staff position upon which, in his desperation, he had pinned the most extravagant hopes. Though he morosely assured himself it would be a wild-goose chase, he now could not afford to neglect any chance. His mother handed him the money for the expense of the trip, which he pretended not to know came from Miss Bass.

He found Hamilton Dycer's company sprawled over two floors of a big office building. He gave his name to a receptionist and sat down to wait with a number of others, who frowned, gnawed their lips, or nervously smoked, in

intense concentration upon the purposes with which they, too, were here. On a table were various publications of the house, magazines with covers like candy boxes, bearing invariably reproductions of flashily pretty girls, beneath which were printed in black, arresting type the sensational titles of some of the features inside. Most of these periodicals seemed to be of the confessional kind, but there were a number of others also, magazines in a variety of specialized fields, such as the new inventions of radio or motion pictures and home building and beautifying.

Giles picked up two or three and glanced through them wonderingly. Finally he even began one of the first-person stories that was illustrated by glistening photographs of deceived husbands pointing accusing fingers over cowering wives at male models whose greased abundant hair could only belong to young men whose sole mission in life was love. Very slowly Giles read on. Though the psychology was crudely ignorant, the motivations preposterously false, and the whole effect that of a complete corruption of sense, taste, dignity and intelligence, Giles was deeply impressed. He was almost annoyed not to be able to finish it when he was informed that Mr. Dycer would see him now.

He moved through a winding aisle past hundreds of desks where a subdued hum of voices and the tapping of many typewriter keys sent out the most warming intimations of activity and success. Clerks clutching sheafs of memoranda passed by; there was a feeling of importance in the air, the feeling of money being rapidly made. Giles felt more and more awed. He wet his lips nervously as he was ushered into a principal office that carried Hamilton Dycer's name on its glazed door.

Like Brale, Dycer, too, had changed, but in his case the pendulum had swung the other way. He rose from behind his desk in lordly fashion, and held out his hand with a deep, practised smile of cordiality that at the same time declared how grand he was. His voice, as oratorical as ever, rolled with the magic of assurance. Behind this magnificent

affability, his eyes, slightly narrowed and full of shrewdness, at once took stock of his visitor, with that directness of comprehension which is founded upon an inviolable consistency of viewpoint, and ascribes the same ignoble motives, without exception, to everyone.

Looking at him humbly enough, Giles had an abrupt recollection of Dycer's disgraceful funk in the hold of the *K-13*. Of them all, Dycer had been the only one to break, who in the last hours before their rescue had openly wept, who had blubbered, cringed and implored with a shamelessness that was too shocking to think about. No trace of that soft spot was now discernible in the elaborate personality which was projected so grandiloquently. He demanded at once of Giles in a hearty voice whether he were married and had a family, and when Giles shook his head, said that in that case he was missing the best in life; he himself had married right after the war, and now had two children, one of them, a boy, only a month old.

"My little daughter," he declaimed in a voice that rose and fell like cheap music, and had the solemnity of a speech delivered from a platform, "said to me one day, 'Daddy, I want a little baby brother to play with.'" He paused, and gravely added: "And so I gave her a little baby brother."

Giles smiled uneasily, not knowing what comment to make upon this remarkable statement. But Dycer, leaning back again, now asked still other personal questions; and for once, as if overawed, Giles did not pretend anything, but admitted that he had been having difficulties and was growing discouraged.

Dycer struck the desk with his fist. "Shake it off!" he cried. "Get rid of such defeatist thoughts! Let me tell you a story. I was utterly down on my luck a few years ago. I felt as badly as you do. Frankly, I saw no way out. Then one morning I stepped off the Congressional Limited in Washington, and going into the men's room, I was standing in the lavatory there, when suddenly it dawned upon me I had no enemies except myself! The world was taking me

at my own valuation! In that moment I understood everything. I came away inspired—I have never stopped since!”

The incongruity of the surroundings in which the birth of this illumination had occurred did not seem to strike Dycer as peculiar, nor, for that matter, Giles himself. Nevertheless, Giles’ instinct was made vaguely uneasy by the emanations of pompous charlatanism with which he was now being deluged. Without being able to define what puzzled him, he was disturbed by an insincerity which never appeared to relax for an instant. Hamilton Dycer, bursting with the proof of his rightness in his success, apparently projected thoughts exactly as an actor projected emotions: they were merely simulated for the sake of effectiveness. In his enormous insincerity, sincerity itself seemed to be one of his principal poses. Yet with all this there was something engaging about him, too, something obscurely comic, almost touching, as though he, too, were somehow frightened and lost and sad.

And now, with the abruptness of a man too busy for any ordinary transitions, Dycer swept the board of all further personal reminiscences, and explained why he had sent for Giles from Boston.

It seemed that among the publications of the house there was a health magazine, which advocated as a cure-all, complex muscular exercises, water cures and sun bathing, milk diets, long fasts, and similar miraculous therapies. Unfortunately, it had not been doing well.

“It needs a shot in the arm, as you doctors say—a galvanic jolt. I want you to give it that jolt.”

And very rapidly he outlined the idea for a series of articles that were to be made as sensational as possible—articles that mercilessly and authoritatively attacked the abuses, blunders, and hypocrisies of the entire medical profession. One of them, for instance, could expose the millionfold results of mistaken diagnoses, from which more persons had died than in any known war; another could riddle that grasping class of physicians who preyed like

wolves upon silly, well-to-do women, or operated needlessly upon rich hypochondriacs; still another could list grimly all those pretended discoveries which had been hailed with enthusiasm by one medical generation, and promptly and contemptuously discarded by the next.

As Will sat there, he grew quite pale. Thinking of the handicaps so bravely accepted, the thin rewards and wearisome toil which was the fate of the average doctor, his indignation at these glib half-truths that he was now compelled to listen to, filled him with detestation of the man in front of him. But all at once Dycer said:

"And for each article—and there should be at least six of them—I will pay you two hundred dollars."

Two hundred dollars—in the end twelve hundred dollars! What relief, what happiness, was embodied in that sum! Giles wet his lips again, and clung hard to his honesty, like a man clinging to the rim of a precipice.

"I couldn't possibly put my name to any article like that," he said huskily.

Dycer looked over swiftly at him. He smiled.

"My dear Giles, no doctors are likely to read them, if that's what is bothering you!"

Giles glanced down miserably. It was perfectly true, no reputable physician ever paid any attention to such ignorant attacks. Then he heard Dycer's voice proceeding smoothly:

"I may even be able to increase the rates a little in your case—provided you can give us some really hard-hitting, crackerjack material. Yes, if you can do that, we might even make it three hundred an article!"

Will got quickly and nervously to his feet as if he could save himself only by flight. He said weakly that he would think it over. He saw Dycer's dramatically outthrust hand at the end of a long arm, was engulfed again by his beaming smile, and feeling almost sick, made his escape into the outer office. In his hurry to get away from here, he even neglected to look up Brale and say a word to him.

When he reached Boston that evening, he had taken it

for granted that he was going to do nothing further about the matter. But the effect he expected from the story he poured out to his two sympathetic auditors seemed to be quite the contrary. He stared dumbfounded as his mother looked down and picked happily at her apron, and as Miss Bass clasped her hands and exclaimed:

"Oh, Will, how wonderful! I knew you were going to have good luck soon. And I'll help you with them—you must let me help you with them—you don't know how useful I can be!"

Their simple delight, their innocent blindness as to what had been really asked of him, left him crushed and silent. How could he dash that cup from their lips? They would not even understand. And could it be that they were somehow right, that it really did not matter? Perhaps he was being too finicky; the subscribers to *Natural Health* believed already the vituperative nonsense that Dycer was willing to pay him for; and no one else, as he had shrewdly said, was ever likely to see it.

His hold on the precipice was trembling. Then the bell rang, and a collector from the loan company called and asked him with a mixture of bullying and contempt just when he intended to pay something on account. His hold slipped, and the abyss received him.

He wrote the first article by getting a little drunk beforehand. Miss Bass pronounced it excellent, and typed it neatly herself. Two weeks later he received a congratulatory letter from Hamilton Dycer, enclosing a check for three hundred dollars. Miss Bass read the letter over his shoulder. Then she drew the check from his fingers and waved it gaily and triumphantly in the air.

"It won't take a year," she said softly. "Just think! In a year—maybe less—you'll be able to pay off everything. And then start a new practice somewhere. And we'll be together, won't we? We'll be together!"

Her eyes had a filmy look and seemed to demand that he, too, express his sense of that predicted rapture. She held

up her face to be kissed. It had a damp, unpleasant feeling like a cold stone. For the first time he was disagreeably conscious that Miss Mass's breath was not sweet. There was something vaguely chemical about it.

That evening he sat down to write a second article and on this occasion he did not have to get drunk. Indeed, he was surprised, as time went on, to find how little his scruples actually troubled him. He even looked back with wonder on the way he had felt that day in Dycer's office, and now recalled his intention of refusal as something quite incomprehensible. It was true that when his first article appeared in print, he shivered at the sight of his name there, and quickly turned the magazine upside down. But soon even that did not much bother him, minimized as it was by the delightful pleasure of calling on the doctor he had gulled with a check in his pocket, and of meeting the loan company's collector with scornful assurance. It gave him a proudly virtuous feeling. But how slowly his debts diminished! He felt as if already he had been paying forever, and there was no let-up in sight.

He had not contributed many scathing article to *Natural Health* before Dycer sent for him, and informed him he had a new assignment for him. He would be paid as much as a thousand dollars this time. It was to be a book, "a brand-new approach to the important subject of sexology," Dycer declaimed. "The title I have already formulated: *Sane Sexuality from Seventeen to Seventy*—what do you think of that? But it must be frank! It must be honest! It must be more forthright than any previous book in its class! We want to strike a blow against prudery with it. It must not be merely cold and scientific—after all, this is fundamentally a book about love!"

Giles recoiled. He protested he was not equipped to produce any such work.

"Then read the others!" Dycer cried. "Adapt them—improve upon them,—above all, put warm human blood into them! Why, you'll have no trouble at all!"

So Giles set painfully to work on a new loathsome task, and though much of it was little more work than copying, it took him almost six months to complete it. He had modestly tried to release Miss Bass from helping him in the endeavour, but she refused to hear of it, sending him one of her frank smiles of comradeship. And it uncomfortably seemed to him, as time went on, that she appeared to find some peculiar relish in the task, an interest that often had a disagreeable aroma of excitement, of something feverish and gloating.

From beginning to end this book was nearly a horror to him. For he knew perfectly well that what Dycer meant by his magniloquently pronounced words was really only pornography; and he was in a sweat for fear he would fail, and all his detested toil should go for nothing. For of late Dycer had seemed to be growing more critical, had even turned down flatly a couple of shorter pieces, and made him rework still others.

He shut his mind to every consideration except his goal: when the loathly job should be done and payment made, he would, at any rate, not have a debt in the world, and could look every man in the face, with perhaps the possible exception of himself. And then—by doing whatever was asked of him for six months more—or even less—he would be able to save enough to open up a new practice, and inaugurate it properly, with all that he had so bitterly learned to guide him this time.

He thought of these things very hard, and the book, finished finally, was rushed through its printing and the money paid over. Giles, looking at an advance copy of the shameful work, saw his name there on the title page, "By Dr. William Giles." He stared at it a little stupidly, without much reaction. His eyes went away from it with a grave, rather lofty expression. He even smiled as though with the most benevolent tolerance. He was not conscious of any actual embarrassment. For something had happened to him. It had been happening slowly yet powerfully during the

year in which he had been paying off his past mistakes through the medium of Hamilton Dycer.

It was the result of his casual frequenting of the bookstore that sold mystical and theosophical works, and of his strange, absorbed intimacy with the other frequenters that developed from this.

At first he had visited the place exactly as a man visits a club. He went often in simple curiosity without taking very seriously the obscure theories that assailed anyone who lingered there. He even felt rather sorry for people so obviously simple and uneducated, and so pathetically convinced that the truth, which had been hidden from the learned and the intelligent, had been reserved for them because of their very simplicity.

Moreover, their various hallucinations, seemed to produce an attitude in which at least there was nothing but good will. They were very amiable on the whole; there was nothing brutal about them. But one and all, as in the case of those quasi-religions that anxiously deny reality, that deny illness and even death and declare these a form of sin or error, or that preen themselves upon an indefinable affection called spirituality, seemed to have embraced such beliefs out of the most agitated sense of materialism and a ceaseless dominance by fear. And perhaps this source was not so peculiar, after all, since their entire efforts represented merely an attempted denial of traits that filled them with uneasy shame.

It was a strange, separate, and clearly recognized world into which Giles had accidentally penetrated. Soon he began to be invited to their homes, and to readings, meetings, and various séances. He could hardly keep up with the enormous variety of the inspirations by which they intended to solve everything. In disagreement with one another upon one phantasm, they usually overlapped in others. All of them seemed to be vegetarians and to have a deep-seated fear of alcohol. Only a few of them smoked. They had theories about dress, about colours that vibrated good or evil; some were convinced astrologers and carried little books and

charts constantly in their pockets and worked out mysterious calculations for every moment of the day. Others believed in the mystic power of numbers, in abstruse arrangements of their own names wherein each letter signified a number that was pregnant with the most incalculable forces. Often they had changed their names in absurd ways to propitiate these forces. Many others went in for spirit handwriting, and with closed eyes allowed a pencil to write babblings spasmodically over great sheets of paper while their minds were assumed to be blank and receptive of their individual "controls." There were quite a number of books in the little store that had been created in just this way. They talked solemnly of auras, of East Indian breathing exercises which granted them extraordinary resistant powers, of complex dietary systems that had some religious significance. Others passionately preached nudism, or were devoted sun-worshippers. Nearly all of them sought to overthrow the evolutionary changes of a million centuries in a decade or even a fortnight. It was a wonder none of them attempted to walk on all fours.

The largest and most coherent group of all was a semi-organized sect whose credo was a kind of revised Blavatskyism, which saw existence as a series of ceaseless transmigrations, in which the sins or purities of one life ordered the pattern of the next that succeeded it.

Giles, listening mildly always, soon picked up the specialized vocabulary which explained this fanciful system. There was something oddly comforting about an idea which required no trinities, no godheads, no sacrifices, no concrete mythology, but in which, instead, all godhead rested simply in oneself. He had begun by feeling gently superior to the proselytes of this vague but exultant faith; before long he discovered a strange thing: by adopting some of it, even without much conviction, he was enabled to feel superior to other people, too! He was able to feel superior without parting with his humbleness in the least. Indeed, that, too, was intrinsic in it. You manifested your superiority by being

always in the wrong, always acknowledged weakness; weakness, of course, in the unimportant things of the world.

Presently Giles discovered he felt less self-conscious about his shabby clothes and defeated appearance; he even desired to increase these aspects like a uniform of purity. His claustrophobia, too, appeared all at once to be gone for good, and he was no longer obsessed by the immediate wish to explain to new acquaintances that he had begun life as a newsboy. His round, insignificant face became more and more arresting with its suffusion of saintliness. He forgave everyone, and in his forgiveness experienced the satisfaction of superiority.

And without knowing quite how it happened, without, certainly, any formal induction, or ceremonies of initiation, he discovered he had become an accepted, and even an important, pillar of this faith.

So it was that as he gazed upon the title page of the book he had practically plagiarized, and had merely teased up into an abhorrent heightening of voluptuous insinuations he was able to gaze calmly, he was able to be tolerant of this, too.

Unfortunately this sure protection from the world that he had discovered weakened his ability to cope with the world at the same time. From denying the reality of unpleasant things, it was only a step to denying the reality of everything. If nothing existed except a state of subconsciousness—that receptive state in which the soul absorbed the wisdom of the mysterious Masters—then nothing else mattered either, surely not trivialities like appointments or agreements, barely even food or clothing.

Yet his instinct held him back for a little longer from the final drugged plunge. He was still able to put into separate compartments such things as life was made of, and such things as filled his dreams—they were not yet fused together in the blankness of inertia.

So it was that when a summons from Dycer took him to New York, he went uneasily. For Dycer had rejected his

last three articles in a row. The fact was that his delusions had poisoned his efforts with a fatal indifference; and his recent contributions had even smacked of the vague, inconclusive, and wholly unintelligible style of the works he now constantly pored over.

He knew, almost as he stepped into the office, what was in store for him. Dycer had Brale inside at the moment, and was engaged in reducing his old superior to abjectness with a kind of bullying jocularly. Brale, smiling nervously, locking and unlocking his hands, and pale to his jowls, looked altogether miserable as Dycer relished his own humour full of polite threats, offensive patronizing, and much magnanimity. At last he let Brale go, with an air of having shown Giles how formidable he could be when he chose. Then with the most paternal solicitude he informed Giles promptly that his services would not be required any longer.

"You need a rest, my dear man! Why, the things you've been sending in are incredible—they miss the whole idea of our policy to help humanity! Something seems to have changed you, since you first began working for us. Get away from it, get away from yourself for a while! I'm afraid until you do, we can't be of any more use to you."

Giles agreed with everything with idiotic enthusiasm. Like Brale, he smiled warmly, and shook Dycer's hand as if with affection. But in spite of his peaceful air as he left the building, he was very much depressed. He was upset that this kind of thing should happen to him once more, leaving him, as usual, without any idea where to turn. Why had he been so anxious to pay off his debts with such completeness? How was he going to open up a new office now and wait for practice, without Dycer behind him and those wretched but profitable articles? It was as though victory had been knocked out of his hands at the ironic moment of presentation.

And it came over him uneasily also that the pleasing unworldliness of the theories which he had been soaking up

for the better part of the past year would not have been possible without the blunt, worldly fact of Dycer's patronage. Apparently it was even necessary to pay for the privilege of disbelieving in money.

But he did not enjoy having these disagreeable opinions shared by anyone else, and when he reached Boston, he was irritated, nearly furious, at the way his mother and Miss Bass took the news.

The distress of the two women to whom he mattered so much, and to whom alone he mattered at all, was perfectly plain. Mrs. Giles immediately began to fire off a whole series of jokes with a face that was perfectly blank with alarm, while Miss Bass, doubling her fist against her mouth in an awkward movement, suggested a grotesque intention to gnaw at it.

Will's annoyance was mixed with a malicious perversity. He said loftily:

"What is there to be scared of? Now if you only knew what I know, you wouldn't be scared! If you're in harmony, see, it gives you secret power, and then you're given help and instruction. Being under the sign of Gemini, it happens I'm going through bad auspices right now, just like Mrs. Tyla Leaprow told me the other day. But all I got to do is concentrate, and say one word over and over again, just the simple word 'Oom'——"

Miss Bass, who from the first had been cool towards Will's theosophical conversation, had not until now exposed the intensity of her disgust with it. She cried out with shrill violence:

"How can you talk such nonsense at a time like this! Are you out of your head, or just a complete fool? I can't bear another word of this!"

She went white with her own emotion, and sat miserably clenching and opening her fingers. Mrs. Giles, for once, did not spring to Will's defence, though it was impossible to say whether she supposed the rebuke a salutary one or was too bewildered to know what was going on.

Will gazed blandly at their unhappy faces. The outburst he had brought about had soothed him for the moment.

"If you only realized how sure I feel about things, how peaceful!" he said in a mild, placating tone. His vulgar accent and uncertain grammar lent his aspiring utterances a kind of humble dignity. "I wish I could make you see, too. You can be absolutely certain everything's going to come out O.K. All you got to do is to get rid of fear and trust me completely."

"Like God," said Mrs. Giles crazily with an air of not knowing what she was saying: "all others pay cash."

Will sent her an aggrieved look. Then he smiled compassionately, and gently shut his eyes. His mouth formed an ellipse. It could be seen that he was pronouncing "Oom" inaudibly. From Miss Bass there came a short, despairing sob. The door banged behind her. Will took no notice. He sat on with closed eyes, while his mother began to put together their supper with a dazed expression.

Next morning there was a mysterious letter for Mrs. Giles asking her to call at a law office, without any explanation. Will listened benevolently to her wild speculations about what it could possibly signify.

"It couldn't be another legacy," she exclaimed, "because I haven't a relative now left in the world. Besides, lawyers never want to give you money; they want to take it away from you. Must be after ours, I guess! Say, maybe it's Rudolph Valentino's latest wife suing me for alienation of affections! Or maybe it's some other Mrs. Giles they got me mixed up with. If so, and they should want to give me something, I can tell you I'll never let on!"

Giles ignored these blatant boasts and conjectures with sad silence. After his mother had gone, he picked up a book that his friend Mrs. Tyla Leaprow had recommended for study, and began to read it very slowly. Now and then he paused and thought over what he read with an earnest, intellectual expression. The morning went swiftly. At noon Miss Bass came in from her library. All trace of last night's

angry outburst had gone from her face. She made no reference to it, and seemed altogether gay-spirited.

Shortly after that, Mrs. Giles appeared. She had been crying, and yet at the same time a foolish, incredulous smile was stamped as if with permanence upon her face. She had hurried up the stairs so rapidly that for several moments she could not get her breath. They both gaped at her. Her muddled smile deepened. At the same time between her gasps for air, she emitted loud sniffs, and wiped new tears from her eyes.

"George Galbraith is dead," she now burst out in a wail. "Down in the West Indies, it happened. That good man—that good man! And he's left everything to me! It's for you, Will, he did it. And it's lots—almost four thousand dollars! Oh, Will, I guess maybe you was right when you said we ought to trust you. It's wonderful, that's what it is. But just the same, I'd give every penny of it back, and more, too, just to have George alive again."

Miss Bass put her hand over her heart in a fluttering gesture. She looked over quickly at Will, and began to smile weakly. Her mouth quivered as if in apology. In the feminine way she gave him full credit for this turn in their fortunes, exactly as if he had brought it about himself.

But Will was thinking with shocked feelings about Galbraith. A burst of love and regret came over his heart. Bitterly he repented not having seen Galbraith since their quarrel and mended things.

He reflected that he had been rescued once more through no efforts of his own. Then unexpectedly his unstable mind veered, and he rapidly climbed to a sense of being insulted and belittled. Galbraith had left him his money because he was sorry for him, because actually he had contempt for him, and was quite convinced of his inability ever to earn a living! He had left it, moreover, in the hands of Mrs. Giles, as if he did not even trust Will with its management. Thinking again of that last bitter quarrel, in which he had been so unjust, stupid and weak, he transferred his resent-

ment of his own behaviour to Galbraith. He had told himself at the time he would never forgive him. And now Galbraith was offering him his scornful charity like a jeer, like a tip, across the grave.

Full of this insane resentment, he now looked up, and saw Miss Bass's intense eyes resting upon him with an enigmatic expression that nevertheless made him move uncomfortably in his chair. He scowled instantly. His brain was singularly free of any desire at the moment to be, or even seem, saintly and good. He was surprised, oddly pleased, and oddly hurt to hear himself saying quickly:

"I don't want to touch a penny of his money."

There was deep silence in the depressing room in the tenement. And gratified by the sensation he had made, and aware of their longing to do anything to prevent him from taking such a senseless and destructive course, his timid jaw suddenly hardened, and the weak man's inviolable obstinacy seized his will like a vice.

"Yes, that's right," he said again, his voice now set with implacability, "I won't touch a penny of it. *You* can do what you like with it. But I'll never take a single cent!"

He gazed swiftly at their bewildered faces, yet knew himself to be more bewildered still. For he could not think why he was doing this thing, or whom he imagined he was hurting by it except himself. All he knew was that he experienced a savage pleasure in his decision, and that he was prepared to sacrifice everyone and everything to this gratification.

His belligerent determination seemed to make them realize the futility of immediate protest or argument. Mrs. Giles began to wander forlornly about the room straightening it up as she murmured feebly to herself, like someone helpless from stupidity. Her face had never looked so careworn. Soon Miss Bass said brightly she must be off to work again. Will smiled most agreeably at her. With a solemn air, he picked up his book once more.

And during the next two days the subject, as though it

were something of the most embarrassing nature, was not brought up again, although it was plain none of the three had really thought in the meanwhile of anything else.

On the morning of the third day, Mrs. Giles dropped a tiny bombshell by announcing she had decided to take a journey to Springfield, and pay a visit to her old school friend there, Minnie Jacobs. It was true she had often talked wistfully of Minnie Jacobs and the good times they used to have together, but such a departure from routine was more than unusual in her. She said that she would be back the following morning, which was Sunday, and that Emma had promised to drop in and see that Will was quite comfortable and had everything he needed. Her voice with its excessive cheerfulness contained a flurried sound, and Will looked at her quickly, knowing at once that plans had been made behind his back, and that this unexpected trip had other reasons than the surface ones it claimed.

However, he said nothing, and that day, after his mother had left, he wandered aimlessly about the city, making the pretence of inquiring about one of those medical appointments of which he had long since given up hope. Actually he was feeling quite miserable, for he saw no outcome anywhere. He even wondered why he had taken his ridiculous stand about Galbraith's money; and deprived of all opposition, his own obstinacy gave him now a sick feeling.

When, after five o'clock, he returned to the tenement, he discovered that Miss Bass was already there, having let herself in with Mrs. Giles' key. She seemed to be in the friendliest of moods, made him sit down in the one comfortable chair, whisked a pillow deftly behind his back, and went on cooking his supper. A large round of hamburger was hissing in a frying pan, the coffee percolator was bubbling vigorously, and on the table stood a quart of bootleg whiskey that must have cost a pretty penny.

Will was hungry, for he had not eaten all day, and the smells of the cooking food were intoxicating. Nevertheless,

he explained gravely that it was wrong to eat meat, because that meant the killing not of animals alone but of persons who were currently inhabiting them. Also, alcohol was wrong, too, because it coated certain spiritual centres, thus making it difficult for the Masters to get into contact with the sincere pupil. However, he added, nothing did one any harm so long as one knew the truth about it, and besides, one should be able to accept everything at times and not be a bigot or a fanatic. Miss Bass smiled and said she was sure he was perfectly right.

He ate hugely, and sat back with a large glass of whiskey and water, and a big cigar that Miss Bass had fetched along as a present. He felt well-disposed towards her, and he was still more gratified when, making a place for him beside herself on the sofa, she began to ask him questions about his mystical studies. He talked eagerly, trying to convince her, and she seemed interested, prompting him now and then, whenever a subject began to wear out. He filled another glass with whiskey, and drank that, too. It gave him a fuzzy sensation, and his head did not feel right, but he was no longer worried about things. He explained that the Masters were giving him strength.

A pause fell in the dim, tawdry room. In an idle voice Emma changed the subject. She said she had been thinking all day about an idea. Why didn't he begin practice in one of the suburbs this time? Rents were so much cheaper there, and it was so much easier to build up a circle of patients in a neighbourhood where people often knew one another.

Will smiled regretfully, and murmured that even to do that, he would have to get some money first.

Miss Bass licked her lips. She said, making a clear effort to control her exasperated voice:

"But you've got Galbraith's money—you don't need any more!"

He turned his serene eye on her. He gave a faint gesture of regret and finality.

"Let's not talk about that," he said, as if sorrowfully. "You know how I feel about that."

Miss Bass was silent. Then she sighed, as if she were very tired, and leaning closer, rested her head upon his shoulder.

Some electric sense passed through Giles like a kind of shock. His wits and nerves came abruptly alive. He was instantly aware that her action, which simulated mere affectionate warmth, was revealed to be a pretence by the strange mixture of trembling and rigidity which he sensed throughout her entire body. He was all at once alertly on his guard, and alarmed by a shadowy intuition of some intention against him that masked its true purpose. Without experience, he now divined that Miss Bass had made up her mind to seduce him.

A distaste, not remote from repulsion, passed through him. He had by now grown too used to her to find any excitement in her. Her superb body that supported its commonplace head no longer invited his secret speculations. And the head itself protected him from the weakness of attraction, for in this past harrowing year Miss Bass had lost the last of her meagre bloom. Her colourless hair suggested an excessive, stale greasiness, while her skin had subtly coarsened. Upon it, in the scanty light the rouge which she had apparently put on more thickly this evening, stood out like dirty blotches.

Will got up. There was a quickness about this removal that in turn seemed to tell her instantly all that had just passed in his mind. She watched him for a moment in dead silence. Then, pushing her hair back, she said in a low, curiously matter-of-fact voice:

"You don't love me. You don't love me any more. You don't even want to marry me now."

Will muttered something, a mere resentful, uncomfortable sound.

She laughed then. It was a shocking laugh, for it threw away, as if with pleasure, all the simulations of feminine refinement, shyness and delicacy. Getting up, too, she poured

out a large drink of whiskey, swallowed it defiantly, and stood as if considering. Then her laugh welled up again. It grew more and more rapid and uncontrolled. She was building her own hysteria.

"You won't take that money just to avoid marrying me!"

She pronounced her words as if with the relish of an enormous humour.

"That isn't so," he faltered. "You don't understand how Galbraith and I——"

She cried out in a vulgar way that filled him with shock and surprise:

"Shut up!"

Then, taking a breath, and gulping back her own laughter, she began to pour out at him in a distracted fashion wild accusations and insults. He stood looking at her indignantly like a boy who has been pushed unexpectedly into a snow bank, or had his chair whipped out from under him at a party. But more powerful than this animus was a frank terror of her, for he saw that the chief element in her new revelation of herself was the determination to stop at literally nothing.

"Emma! Emma!" he cried. "You mustn't! You don't know what you're saying!"

He wondered stupidly what he could do to halt her. If only he could escape! But she was ill; she seemed half-deranged; he could not possibly leave her like this. He thought wildly of trying to use his hypodermic on her. But of course she would not let him. In the end he filled a glass of water with a shaky hand and offered it to her with a pleading smile. She took it from his fingers and dashed the contents into his face.

Standing there, with the water dripping down his collar, he knew he must make the most abject and contemptible figure possible. Meanwhile, there was no let-up from her in the flood of abuse she was venting upon him in screeches, broken by her crazy laughter.

And this abuse, in its violence, seemed to have passed

beyond those barriers in which certain things may never be said, no matter how severely driven by rage and hate. She held up to scorn his appearance, his looks, his shabby clothing; mocked him for his ignorant, brainless mysticism, calling him a coward; declared him ridiculously incompetent in his calling as a doctor, a born failure; sneered at him as impotent as a man whom no woman would ever want; and letting herself go still farther, began to hurl at him the account of her benefactions, all her gifts and favours, omitting nothing; not the farmhouse she had secretly bought out of her own savings, not even the whiskey—her whiskey!—that he had drunk tonight.

He listened, white-faced and miserable, wondering only when all this was to end. Surely she could not go on much longer! But her released vitality stunned him with the promise of its resources. In a vague way he perceived she meant to crush him, no matter what happened to her in the process. He shivered as if he were very cold.

And listening like that, he was amazed, beneath everything else he felt, at the extraordinary number of things she remembered. What was this peculiar gift of women, to be unable to learn or recall the plainest information, yet to forget nothing of the least personal nature that had ever happened to them? For indeed she remembered everything, and these things came out now like taunts—the very words he had once unthinkingly said, the moments when he had happened to turn to her in grateful devotion.

He was conscious how late it was. He should have been asleep hours ago. But she never halted for an instant and scarcely ever repeated herself. He waited dumbly like an animal out of which the life is being methodically beaten.

Then suddenly it was all over. She dropped face downward on the sofa. She began to weep horribly there. He had no impulse to go over to her and comfort her. He felt far too ill. In a lost way he heard her weeping die out, begin again, and die out once more. Soon her breathing showed she was asleep. She slept peacefully.

But Giles himself could not sleep. He was too exhausted. He moved wanly about, and finally sat down in the chair. He kept his eyes turned away from her. He wanted to go somewhere but he did not know where. He could not wander the streets the rest of the night. What time was it? He looked at his watch and saw that it was almost two in the morning.

He remained like that with his eyes wide open, fixed in a kind of vacant despair. His mind reported none of the cruel things she had said. He was glad it was so still in here. It was like being dead and forgotten.

At last a dirty-coloured light began to streak through the tenement window. With an effort Giles got up. He went as quietly as possible out into the hall, and entered the bathroom on the landing with the intention of dousing his hot, sticky face with water and combing his disordered hair.

Suddenly she was there behind him, as mysteriously unexpected as an apparition. Her sleep had apparently refreshed her, and her expression seemed exactly the same as when she had dropped down. As he spun around and looked at her in broken entreaty, she cried:

"Well, are you going to marry me, or aren't you?"

"Leave me alone," he muttered. "For God's sake, leave me alone!"

He stumbled away from her and got inside the room again. But she was on his heels. Her hideous laughter rose once more in preparation. He pressed his hand convulsively against his ears. He felt as if his brain were going to snap. Then, looking around wildly, he found his hat and started in a blind rush for the door. But before he could reach it, the wretched spinster had dropped to her knees in front of him and gripped his legs with her arms. She began to sob horribly.

"Don't leave me, don't leave me! I'll do anything! Don't you know how I love you, how I worship you!"

Then suddenly, as if she knew where her real enemy in him lay, she began to plead with him in rapid, frantic words

to give up completely his illiterate theosophy. It would ruin him in the end, it would not help him. And if he would only forgive her, she would work her fingers to the bone for him. She would make him successful, yes, rich! She was his only friend. Together they could help his mother also. They would start today, this instant, and he must never look at those books any more, or see those foolish people again.

For an instant, in spite of all he had been through, Giles, arrested by a kind of vision of sense and self-acceptance, actually wavered. It was an instant in which his small destiny hung in the balance. Then in a kind of rage he violently disentangled himself from her clutches. She exaggerated his freeing of himself into the aspect of a blow. She fell on the floor and began to beat upon it with her fists. Her teeth were grinding like an animal's. He turned and snatched the door open. He heard her shriek out his name once, and in an excess of panic he went flying and leaping down the stairs, with his breath coming in painful gulps.

He was outside at last in the unreal placidity of the grey world. He did not immediately know what to do. Then it occurred to him he might meet his mother at the station. He would certainly have to have her help. No one else could help him. He would never go back to the tenement alone, while Emma Bass in her deranged condition remained there.

He had a long wait before his mother's train arrived. She seemed startled to see him. Her eyes were full of anxiety as she summed up his distraught face in a glance. Giles mumbled exhaustedly that Emma was very upset. Trying to go on, he could not. But Mrs. Giles did not seem curious. She began to talk about Minnie Jacobs.

They walked all the way home together through the half-empty Sunday streets. As he neared home, Giles began to feel more and more uneasy. He would send his mother in ahead, and come back later in the day.

But as they turned into the block where the tenement stood, he and his mother both halted in surprise. A small

crowd of people had collected directly in front of their door, and now stood staring up at the windows. A police patrol wagon was parked at the curb in ominous explanation.

Yet there was nothing especially astonishing about such a sight in that neighbourhood; it was not altogether uncommon. It could easily signify nothing more than some drunken domestic brawl which had been interrupted finally by someone's sending for the police. Or it might merely mean a fight between two men which had ended with one of them being badly hurt, or even the capture of some petty thief or other.

But as Giles tried to assure himself that it was only one of these more commonplace things that had happened, he found he had the most extraordinary reluctance to take another step. His mother had caught hold of his arm, and it was as if she were trying to pull him on.

Just then, before they could come any nearer, a confused sound poured from the crowd. It swayed slightly as it parted. Two patrolmen had emerged from the doorway, holding up someone between them who could not be seen through the wall of bodies.

Nevertheless, Will knew instantly who it was, without the slightest pause of uncertainty. As though his nerves had communicated the fact to his mother, she, too, seemed to be aware. Her eyes went quickly to him. They said simply that whatever distress, whatever horror, was now unfolding, she feared it principally for its effect upon her son.

The police with their prisoner shouldered their way through the onlookers to the open doors of the wagon. As they moved ahead slowly and laboriously, it was clear that the person they held was desperately struggling. But this struggle was entirely silent, lending it a quality obscurely frightening. The next instant the doors of the patrol wagon crashed shut behind all three of them. The wagon itself began instantly to move down the street. At the intersection its siren wailed its parody of human grief.

Will's face felt sticky and wet. He touched it absently.

He was not looking at anyone, and not even thinking of anything. But dimly he heard his mother demanding what had happened from someone in the crowd.

"D.T.'s. I seen 'em too often not to know. Still, I never seen 'em this bad—you oughta heard her screaming before the cops got here!"

Mrs. Giles started hurriedly up the stairs. Will plodded after her. The door of their apartment was open when they reached it.

The view inside was staggering. All the windows had been broken, and there were bloodstains on the sills. A chair had been smashed into a mere pile of dismembered rungs. There were evidences that the flimsy curtains had been set on fire and only recently extinguished.

And inside, also, a couple of strangers were now standing surveying the wreckage with a sort of relish. It did not require a second glance to see that they were plain-clothes men.

One of them, indolently smoking a cigar, glanced up quickly as Giles and his mother made to enter.

"What do *you* want?"

"I live here."

"Oh! Come on in. And you too, lady. Got a few questions to ask."

"What's happened?" said Mrs. Giles with a propitiating, foolish smile. It was clear that she was so distracted she did not know what she was doing or saying.

The detective did not answer her directly. "What do you know about the woman who was in this place?" he asked. "She a relative of yours?"

"Oh, no," Mrs. Giles faltered. "Just a friend. An old, old friend. But why don't you tell us what happened?"

"She just went out crazy, that's all."

Will looked at him calmly. He did not seem to have heard. But Mrs. Giles sank down into the one chair that had not been broken to bits.

"Oh, dear," she said in a whisper. "Oh, dear me!"

And all this had happened long and long ago, almost twenty years ago. The Gileses had moved away shortly afterward, of course. Later Mrs. Giles had learned that poor Miss Bass had died in the institution where she had been confined, but she never told her son. And without saying anything more about it, without disgracing his pride by mentioning it, Will had lived, after all, on Galbraith's legacy. It had gone too soon, as money always did in his hands. He had undertaken many things with bright hopes; he had lent generously to those of the elect from whom the Masters had somehow withheld their favours. And he had drifted, growing more and more saintly-seeming with time, more and more convinced of his mystical illusions, until at last he had been washed up here, a man approaching fifty, inhabiting a dingy loft in a warehouse with companions as wrecked as himself, and yet despite his long, unbroken experience of defeat and privations, confronting the world still with high gentleness and serenity.

And at this particular moment on this fine Spring morning, they were all sitting with the patience of so many animals waiting for prey. Will read composedly; Jack Spate puffed at his cigarette in a musing fashion; and Arthur LaRue, relapsed now into defeated silence, fixed his large gloomy eyes voraciously upon space.

There was no use going outside; the streets were bound to be even crueller than in here, and invariably people did drop in off and on during the day. Sometimes one of these would be in funds, or occasionally be accompanied by some obliging stranger.

So it was that Arthur looked up eagerly as a knock came at the door, Jack Spate's eyes narrowed, and even Will dreamily lowered his book.

But the man who then entered was clearly a disappointment to them all. He was only Frank Pengelley, the thin, elderly ex-clerk, with his invariable briefcase under his arm. His tall figure and black clothes gave him a singularly funereal aspect. But there was something so blank and extra-

ordinarily indefinite about his face that people usually looked away immediately, and then sometimes with surprise looked back for the very same reason. When he talked, his arms made flailing gestures like jointed sticks. Very little could be made out of the low, strangled, and confused sounds which issued from his mouth.

He now greeted them, saying something which was probably to the effect that he had happened to be passing by and so just dropped in. He put down his briefcase carefully against the rungs of his chair. Though he was never seen without it, it was known to contain nothing but a faded newspaper clipping about his rescue of a boy from drowning in Lake George years ago. Mr. Pengelley was always willing to show this clipping to anyone who cared to see it, and often showed it, without either invitation or preamble, to people who decidedly did not.

Arthur LaRue gave him a weary look and turned fastidiously away as if he were not even there. Jack Spate, too, had scarcely a second glance for him. But as always, Will was sympathetic and polite, and made some kind of answer.

Mr. Pengelley, leaning forward with a watery smile, then mumbled some sounds which experience enabled Will to make out held the inquiry as to whether there was any coffee around, and a roll, say? Will had to tell him there was nothing; and Mr. Pengelley with a deprecating smile waved it off as a matter of no consequence, a mere whim that possessed him. He sat back and surveyed his feet. So now there were four in the loft who waited.

But nearly an hour passed before the next arrival. He came in without knocking, almost with an effect of bursting in. And this time it was Marc de Zorilla, Will's noisy, exuberant companion on the way home last night.

He was as vehement and irrepressible as ever. It was easy to see that here was someone for whom life could never lose its wonder. Yet, looking at his pink, excited, stupid face, with its blend of many European stocks, someone might well have asked how it was he had been selected as the final

product of countless millions of lives, why it was he had especially been singled out for existence from so many perished blood strains, indifferently wiped out by plagues and wars and incomprehensible caprices. It was painful that so much had gone to produce so little.

Slapping his pockets briskly with both hands, as if he were not already aware of their contents, he now inquired in a strange but fluent English if anyone present had a cigarette to spare. But no one did, and shrugging it off like Mr. Pengelley as no matter, de Zorilla began abruptly to explain to Giles the great idea that had come to him last evening.

It turned out to be a scheme for a restaurant, a new sort of restaurant, on absolute, theosophical principles. It would try to attract converts while at the same time its novelty would be sure to make a fortune for its founders. For only vegetarian dishes would be served in it: wholewheat grains mixed with pulverized nuts, celery, and apples and then shaped into molds that attractively imitated chickens, hams, or rounds of beef; and health soups, special herb teas, and non-alcoholic wines compounded of unusual fruit juices. In a rear room, free literature could be read in comfortable surroundings with someone always on duty to answer questions willingly. Mr. de Zorilla even had a name for this place already: "The Nu-Food Healthway."

He was so overwhelmed by his own invention that, as he spoke in his garbled vocabulary, his discoloured eyes rolled and popped, his small, plump fists expressed absurd defiances in the air, and his tongue splattered like something dropped into hot fat. Perhaps this hysterical enthusiasm was contagious, or it may have been that the shabby men, listening to him, were bored and anxious to escape their own dispirited thoughts or, more likely still, perhaps, any idea connected with food was irresistible to them. At any rate, although Marc de Zorilla had pointedly addressed his words to Will, all the others sat up with interest, and the moment de Zorilla's breath failed him, began to make suggestions almost as intense as his own.

Arthur LaRue, with an air of declaring himself in on the idea in the event anything should come of it, at once pronounced it a downright inspiration.

"I could manage a place like that for you, you know," he said.

Mr. Pengelley was mumbling away. He was trying to make it understood that he was equally eager to offer his services as a cashier. Nobody listened to him, however.

Jack Spate alone was silent and watchful; he had no suggestions to offer about how he, too, could be useful in the enterprise, but there was a hopeful look in his eyes that hinted he would at least be glad to share in its pickings.

But they were all looking at Will, as if everything in the end depended upon him. He reflected for a few instants, and then regretfully shook his head.

"It's a good thought, Marc," he murmured at last, "a very fine thought. That reading-room, now—it would do a lot of good. But to make a restaurant like that go, it would take a great deal of capital. You see, to make it worth while, you'd have to do things on a big scale. Like starting a whole chain of such places, one restaurant in every big city in the country, and in some cities a couple of them even. It's a very large undertaking. Why, I wouldn't want to go into a thing like that with less than a hundred thousand dollars! And I'd rather have two, or even three hundred thousand to play safe."

De Zorilla began to splutter again, but he was drowned out by Arthur's shrewish voice as he snapped at Giles:

"That's just like you—afraid to take a chance on anything. That's why you're here, and why there's nothing to eat in this place. Always play safe, always be cautious, that's your idea—and look where it's got you!" He ended with a ferocious laugh of scorn.

Mr. Pengelley began to mumble harder than ever. Against the uproar Giles could hardly be heard trying to defend himself.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" pleaded de Zorilla, lifting his

pudgy hands imploringly. The voices died down presently, but everyone was sitting tensely and breathing hard.

"I was making about to say," de Zorilla went on, "that I had reflected to myself something else, too. On the windows and the menus, we could have in printings this line: 'Our Cuisine Under the Personal Supervision of Dr. William Giles.' You can see, can you not, how important that would be, how it would attract the eye, and warm the confidence? So without you to come in with us, we would suffer a very serious loss."

Will's gentle expression did not change. Nevertheless, he was secretly much pleased by this suggestion.

"Oh, you're welcome to the use of my name anyway, if that's any good to you," he said grandly. "But I still have to say I would not personally care to risk as much capital as a thing like that would need."

Arthur and de Zorilla burst into speech simultaneously to argue him out of this timid conservatism. And as they went on, as they all wrangled with fury and bitterness about this chimera in which none of them actually believed for a moment, they seemed like a sardonic parody of the multiform business conferences, big and small, which doubtless were taking place in directors' meetings and offices and board rooms in the city all around them. And doubtless, too, there were others like themselves in other places, discussing schemes like this one; clumps of beaten men in every metropolis, who were not merely unemployed, but were unemployable, men to whom each meal was not a commonplace interruption, but an uncertain and important problem, men without women, being men who could not afford a luxury like women, men whose fabulous dreams were all of vast sums of money. No, Giles and his companions were not unique.

"For two thousand dollars, a mean, silly little two thousand," screamed Marc de Zorilla, sweating with agitation, "I could, I can make the promise, do it truly!"

"Why, a thousand would be enough!" Arthur cried. "A

thing like that could even be started on five hundred; I know it! Credit, that's all we need, credit!"

"Better, though, have two thousands," de Zorilla persisted. He turned and flung out one of his gestures at Will. "And to you Mrs. Lora would give such a sum immediately!"

So that was it, that was why de Zorilla had come to him with his great idea! He merely wanted Will's influence with Mrs. Lora to get backing from the well-to-do widow, that and nothing else. The strange thing was that he was right. Such an idea might well appeal to Mrs. Lora, and in any case she trusted Will completely. It might not even be hard to persuade her. But he was rankled to realize the sole use de Zorilla had for him, and he said:

"Frankly, I'm not really convinced. Still I'll think it over."

"When will you have ascribed your course?" demanded Mr. de Zorilla in his extraordinary English. However, Will knew what he meant.

"Oh, by tomorrow morning, maybe," he answered in an evasive tone. "I'd like to sleep on it."

"Why not go and see her today?" Arthur burst out desperately. "You could get the money in ten minutes. And then you could put it in my bank where it would be safe."

Even Will could not help smiling at this suggestion. But just then, before anyone could say another word, they became aware that someone else had entered the room. Turning, they perceived the large, dignified, black face of Mr. Samuel Albemarle-Perry.

His presence, with its promise of an immediate fact, instantly banished any further talk about something which was chiefly in the department of fancy: Arthur gazed at him as hungrily as if he had decided to turn cannibal and eat Mr. Perry himself. Jack Spate watched him warily. Pengeley and Marc de Zorilla seemed equally apprised by instinct that there might be good fortune to be met with here. Even Giles looked over quite eagerly.

After gravely greeting them, Mr. Perry—all of whose movements were solemn and ponderous—slowly set a thick-

handled umbrella against the wall, removed his light overcoat, dusted off the last chair with a bright-coloured handkerchief, and seated himself with the formality of an ambassador.

"It is a very fine day, Doctor," he announced sonorously. "A very fine day. Unusual!" He blew his nose with grandeur.

Fascinated, they could only watch him. And now they saw his hand go into his pocket. How unendurably slow was that movement! The hand came out, it opened. On his outstretched palm could be seen a diminutive top formed of some kind of compressed celluloid material. On its octagonal sides were stamped various figures and symbols.

"I dropped in this morning, Doctor," said Mr. Perry, "to show you this. It has been invented by a friend of mine. A simple gambling device, as you see. With a hundred dollars it could be put on the market right away. I was wondering if you would be interested to take it over on half shares. Your connections would be a great help. And in my opinion a good deal of money could be made out of it."

They stared in stupefaction and disappointment. Then struck, perhaps, by the ludicrous contrast of Mr. Perry's scheme with what they had been talking about, Arthur suddenly began to laugh wildly. De Zorilla presently joined in. Next, curious giggles proceeded from Mr. Pengelley. Jack Spate emitted a mirthless sound like a bark. Will, too, caught the infection.

Disapproving and puzzled, Mr. Perry gazed from face to face. Then all at once he, too, in a rather sheepish way began to laugh as well. Soon they were all abetting each other with fresh spasms. The gloomy loft was filled with the sounds of uncontrolled ecstasy.

At last Will wiped his eyes, and said weakly:

"There's nothing to it, Mr. Perry, honest. It's just a toy; there's nothing to it."

"Perhaps you are right," said Mr. Perry sorrowfully, transferring the top to his pocket once more. "But still I

didn't think it would do any harm just to mention it, and find out what you thought. Well, I must be going.

He got up, and looked to see where he had put his coat. Then suddenly he recollected.

"Oh, I nearly forgot. I have Mrs. Williams' money for you."

Putting his hand into his pocket, he produced a dollar bill which had been folded snugly around two quarters. Will took it, looked at it idly, then, glancing up, met Arthur's famished eyes. With a smile, he handed it over.

"See what you can get us for breakfast, Arthur."

Arthur was gone as though whisked away by a genie, passing Mr. Perry at the door. In less than twenty minutes he was back, carrying a big bag of hard rolls, a little butter, a half pound of coffee, some sugar and canned milk. Surely it had not taken all that money to buy this little! But Will asked no questions. He had already attached the single-burner electric ring that was stained from many droppings, into the single bulb connection of the loft. The galvanized coffeepot was filled and ready. In another ten minutes the breakfast was made. They ate ravenously. In a few minutes it was all over. Mr. Pengelley and Will carried the cups and plates to the sink. Only some sugar and a little canned milk remained. Then Arthur graciously took out a package of cigarettes and passed them around. They all felt more cheerful now. But no one seemed inclined to discuss the Nu-Food Healthway Restaurant any further right now. That would come later, of course. For the present they were happy.

But it was now nearly eleven o'clock. The day, too, as Mr. Perry had said, was fine. Soon the gathering began to show signs of breaking up. Marc de Zorilla hurried off first. Then Arthur, bound upon his painful mission, said a curt good-bye to the rest. And at last Will, as there were no toilet facilities in the loft, put on his hat and started for a stroll in the direction of some public lavatories. Only Frank Pengelley and Jack Spate, who had nowhere to go at all,

remained behind. Mr. Pengelley looked around at the emptiness and coughed. He dipped a hand into his briefcase and came out with the brown-stained, nearly brittle newspaper clipping of his forgotten rescue. His undistinguishable words seemed to be asking or explaining something. Jack Spate made no reply, but merely looked at him with his hostile, blank eyes. Mr. Pengelley smiled, and mumbled again. Then he lifted the clipping and began to read. No word was actually intelligible. Jack Spate listened vacantly.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

AS HE WANDERED across the common in the soft, entrancing weather, Will's mind was quite unconcerned with the impassioned discussion that had occupied him only an hour ago. It was not that Mr. de Zorilla's restaurant did not strike him as a good, a feasible idea. But he had taken part in so many similar discussions in the past years that he did not give much weight to them any more. Always these things were premised on the use of someone else's money, and nearly all of them shared a certain fantastic similarity: patented cereal boxes with compartments for releasing standard portions; bathroom mirrors fitted with spray attachments for mouth wash and shaving lotion; a scheme to corner the caviar market by sending an agent to Russia who could not even speak Russian; a portable, miniature amusement park for the use of school playgrounds; a Chinese headache cure; a lamp that spun around and around and played a small phonograph at the same time. There had been no limit to the number and oddity of the promotions which he had earnestly considered.

As a rule, after great opening enthusiasm and a tense, stimulating argument regarding the division of future profits, the whole thing collapsed easily and gently when no capital could be secured, and was not even mentioned thereafter by its projectors. But on one or two occasions some gullible

person had actually been made to advance a little money, and then the collapse was always accompanied by ghastly rows and accusations. So Marc de Zorilla's idea now passed smoothly from his head, as if it had served its purpose in simply enlivening an otherwise flat morning.

As he walked on in the fine air, observing the tenderness of the green grass and leaves, mottled with restless sunlight, he breathed deeply and happily. The world that brawled closely around him seemed far away. He alone of all the people passing by seemed untroubled by care, or difficulty, or desire. His eye fell on a bench, and some dim memory, like the trifling memories that unaccountably return instead of the tremendous ones, stirred in him. It seemed to him he had once sat there on a hot Summer day long ago, when he was just starting to open his first practice. What had been the occasion and what had happened? He could not clearly recall. He only remembered sitting there on that bench. No doubt he had been very unhappy about something at the time. He had not then learned the wisdom of Karma, and become an adept of the Masters.

He went on, unconscious of any special direction, trusting his legs like a horse. Soon he was beyond the Common and moving through crowded business streets. He looked gravely and compassionately at some of the faces that hurried past, like balloons with expressions of worry painted on them. But he pitied still more those who looked prosperous and successful, women in expensive clothes stepping out of shining cars in front of smart shops, men with good hats and keen, confident faces. It would be harder for them than for any of the others to attain Nirvana, to attain understanding.

There was no malice in these thoughts, and in a strange way he had succeeded in achieving the wisdom that is love. And seeing his pale face with its translucent skin, upon which there was set no signature of greed or competitiveness or shrewd egotism, seeing his pale, fixed and gentle eyes, many people looked at him wistfully, and wondered, perhaps, about his secret.

He went on and on; now the business district was behind him; and presently he wakened to the fact that he was on a cheap residential street, where in the midst of a decaying, old-fashioned mansion or two stood many hastily built, third-rate apartment houses. With a startled recognition he perceived he had been unconsciously heading this way all along. He stopped irresolutely and resentfully. But it was no use; if he turned back now and escaped, it would haunt him all day long. He looked all at once antagonistic and distressed. Then, setting his jaw, he went on. In a moment he came to the place: an apartment with unconcealed fire-escapes, a couple of baby carriages before the door, and the unique horrors of meagre city living exuding from it like a foul odour.

Giles ducked past the door and down into a grilled area-way. A tarnished plaque, set above the entrance here, had upon it the single word "Janitress." He rang. After a moment or two the door was opened, and his mother stood there.

She squealed delightedly, "Why, Will!" and he followed her inside, past a cold cement cellar where ash barrels and boxes of refuse and garbage were piled. Beyond this in the dimness could be seen a huddle of trunks, together with disused cribs and mattresses, dusty cartons bound up with spliced bits of string, worn-out suitcases and even an incongruous, steel filling cabinet. Then Mrs. Giles opened a door and stepped into her own quarters.

It was very dark in here, so dark that even in the brightness of the Spring morning it was necessary to keep a light burning. The bare bulb had a painful glare. The furnishings were incredibly dingy, yet somehow they were not uncheerful. They had, perhaps, partaken of the character of the individual who lived among them.

Certainly Mrs. Giles was as cheerful as she had always been. But now she had become also a very old woman, so much so that she looked as if she had always been that, and it was impossible to imagine her ever having been anything else. In spite of her briskness, it could be seen how very frail

she was. Her face, always heavily wrinkled, was now a complete mesh of lines like a fine net. Her eyes, too, suggested something blurred and defenceless. Only her voice, chirruping and birdlike still, carried the recollections of her early vitality.

She was unaffectedly glad to see him. She sat in a rocking chair, and in her pleasure was unable to keep it from moving backward and forward in a nervous rhythm. She was anxious to show him how happy she was to have him here with her for a moment, and she longed to say, too, that she had been waiting in this single expectancy for many days. But something warned her to keep silent, for he would not like that.

Indeed, Will was frowning faintly. The serenity which had sustained him on his walk was gone. For only with his mother was he ever recalled from his satisfying dream to the world of humiliating reality. Nevertheless, he had to see her now and then, though the visits were always unpleasant to him. She reminded him of things that not even the Masters could dismiss. And her dreadful cheerfulness sent an uncomfortable pang through him and weighed him down.

And now, as she rocked rapidly back and forth, her dim eyes did seem to have become a little keener, and she began to ask him questions that showed how much he had been in her thoughts. Had Mr. Perry found him any more patients? How was that nice Arthur LaRue? Such a sensible young man! And to his brief, reluctant answers she kept saying over and over:

"Nice, Will, nice!"

Just then there came the sound of a furious assault upon a piano in the apartment overhead. It reached them in a series of shrill scales and thundering one-toned vibrations. Mrs. Giles lifted her eyes and smiled approvingly.

"My! How the Professor can tickle the ivories!" she said. She then added: "They had me sit with their little girl last Thursday when they went out." Some private recollection seemed to trouble her, and she turned the conversation with a burst of alacrity. But Will had caught something in her

tone, or on her tell-tale face, for he knew her as she knew him. He asked her at once what had happened.

"Oh, nothing, Will," she answered hastily. "Nothing at all. It will just pass off. You know how people are. Now don't you worry about me. Nelly Giles can lick three policemen any day!"

"Policemen!" said Giles sternly. "What did you say that for? Why don't you tell me what happened?"

His mother looked acutely miserable. Her undignified rocking increased, but did not prevent her from sending him an imploring, frightened smile.

"Did you have trouble with these people upstairs? Is that it?" he persisted crossly.

"Well, not trouble exactly. The Professor's a perfect gentleman—never kicks a lady with his hat on, anyway. And besides, I'm sure it'll turn up."

"What will turn up?" Will cried almost wrathfully. "Why don't you tell me, Mom, instead of sitting there trying to lie like this?"

Mrs. Giles's face had become ashen. She quavered:

"They say I stole the little girl's gold locket. And if I don't—if they don't—find it they're going to the manager about me. But Mr. Soloman's a good man; he'll tell them a thing or two, you'll see. And I don't want you to worry, Will."

He scrutinized her penetratingly. The pure, remote look was gone from his face so that he appeared exactly what he was. Thinking in a hard, clear manner, he saw what the wretched squabble would surely lead to: his mother would be discharged from this job, too, as she had been from all the others. And she had held this for a long time, almost a year, so that it seemed to have a chance of being permanent. It had been a desperate struggle to find it at her age. It would be harder still next time; probably, no matter how cheaply she offered her services, it would even be impossible.

Why was it, he now angrily wondered, that Mrs. Giles inevitably, with the best intentions in the world, always

attracted misfortune? She seemed to have a mania for it, a genius. Did anyone else ever get in trouble so consistently? There was something insulting to humanity about being a fool.

But in his rage at her was also his love. He was filled with bitterness, too, against the world that so senselessly punished her. The last period of her life was something he did not like to think about. She must be protected from all this. He would have to get some money somehow, not just a few dollars that would presently be spent, but enough to take care of her for good, and make her last few years easy. But how on earth was he to do that? Suddenly, unbidden, de Zorilla's scheme for a vegetarian, theosophical restaurant sprang with new importance into his mind.

"Look!" he said. "Don't you worry any more. I'm going to make some real money for you so you can stop working. A friend of mine came to me only this morning with an idea——"

But Mrs. Giles broke in with a quaver of agitation:

"Don't, Will! I don't want you to do anything like that! I'll be all right, I tell you. I don't want you to begin one of them things again, Will!"

He knew instantly what she meant. She thought him certain to fail, and to do himself an injury in the process. The realization hardened him into furious indignation and determination. He would go to Mrs. Lora at once, the moment he left here! He said fiercely:

"I know what I'm doing! This time it's sure! I can't lose!"

Mrs. Giles was silent. Her blurred eyes were beyond sadness. "Yes, Will," she murmured meekly, knowing it was now no use to say any more.

Giles gradually got himself under control. He felt achingly sorry for her. He made up his mind to make it up to her for all his neglect and all her misery. He tried to smile, as one smiles at a child in encouragement. And he began to talk to her as one tells a fairy tale to a child for comfort.

"You wait and see, Mom! You're not going to have to do

anything like this ever any more. Why, I'll get you a house of your own—a fine, big house, like you never even dreamed of. It'll be all marble, see, and the rooms will be big and light, with high ceilings. Sure, and there'll be somebody to wait on you all the time, and you can just loaf and take it easy all you like. And what's more——”

The man, who himself was nearly old, went on talking to the old, old woman. . . .

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

NEW YORK, LIKE Boston, enjoyed its share of the soft Spring weather that morning. All the streets were crowded with people who looked secretly pleased, who observed one another's antics with good humour as well as curiosity, and who seemed glad not to be left out of this unorganized mass celebration.

It was around noon, when the theatrical district was still more densely packed by people on their way to luncheon, that a cab dashed up in front of a decayed-looking office building, and Alfred Zacharias stepped out. He moved quickly, almost furtively, with his head down and his eyes shaded by his black hat, like someone who fears disagreeable solicitations or, even worse, the boredom of overcordial greetings. Then, ducking into the lobby, he caught the elevator to his offices.

Now about fifty, Zacharias had assumed final character and shape. His wig-like hair, in which some grey spirals were at length beginning to show, looked dustier than ever. His expression, too, remained hostile and had an added arrogance. But it could shift like lightning, and the eyes, with their distrustful, resentful look, were still alert and energetic. He was formidable with the authority that had come so surprisingly to him. He had met it halfway for so long that his manner was now impressive from habit. But while he looked rich, while he looked powerful, important, and successful,

his clothes, though cut by the best tailors from the best imported weaves, managed still to preserve the plain statement of his dingy and underprivileged origin. And despite his nerves and rapid, darting movements, he had grown a sizable paunch.

Leaving the elevator, he walked briskly down a dark hallway. The building, which housed chiefly theatrical offices, seedy entertainment brokerages, the cubbyholes of prizefight matchmakers, and assorted enterprises of an obscurely unscrupulous flavour, had a depressing atmosphere. There was something sordid about it, as though it clung to the tradition of a time when the theatre had been an advertisement of the brothel, if not an adjunct of it. Nor was Zacharias' office itself, which he let himself into by a private entrance, much more prepossessing. It, too, was dark, and furnished so dismally it was hard to believe that this had been the clearing house for so much hectic argument, so much flying fame, and so many hundreds of thousands of dollars.

On a rickety table stood piles of unread plays bound in the covers of their various agencies. They looked singularly disheartening. Some of them, mysteriously divined as worthless, had been gathering dust during months of neglect. On another, larger table, among some scattered theatrical papers, stood a bust of Lenin, some volumes by Anna Louise Strong about Russia, and several other works of varying degrees of intellectual pretension on sociological subjects. And just back of the shabby desk was the framed playbill that had been cut from a program of Alfred's first production nearly eighteen years ago:

Alfred Zacharias
(In Conjunction with Rosamund Ransom)
presents
THIS DAY, THIS NIGHT
a new play
by
Jacob Eagle
Production Staged by Mr. Zacharias

Alfred glanced half-indignantly towards the sheaf of letters and telegrams clipped together and waiting for his inspection on the desk. They had been sorted efficiently, as always, by his office manager, the devoted Maury Meyer, who had been with him now for nearly seven years.

But Alfred did not want to tackle them immediately. They were bound to contain problems of tact, or to require suspicious scrutiny against traps, or to offer at the very least mere drudgery. Besides, it was going to be a busy day. Professor Mapleson was coming by appointment to see him, and Oswald Bent, the eminent actor; and the first plans must be sketched for his opening production next season.

This had nothing to do with the "social consciousness" which was the trade-mark of his productions. Still, that did not matter; whenever he did break away from his recognized policy, it was ascribed to him just the same, only in some more subtle approach.

This particular idea had pleased him very much when it had first come to him. He had happened to hear that a dilapidated theatre was about to be razed, and at once the notion had struck him. Why not take a short, cheap lease on the old house, permit the orchestra seats to be torn out by the contractors just as arranged, and make a few simple alterations in the old-fashioned balconies? And then in such a setting, not too dissimilar from the shape of an Elizabethan inn, why not present a Shakespearean revival exactly as the original was supposed to have been presented by a company of Shakespeare's strolling players?

One could do any of the plays one wished that way, without the modern necessity of cutting a line, or transposing a scene, or relying on some butchered "acting version." The production itself would cost nearly nothing. In place of scenery, a mere placard would announce the change from court to battlefield. Perhaps the atmosphere could be recreated altogether. The program might carry a picture giving the audience a clear hint of how it, too, was supposed to act: a picture of gentlemen staring down above an inn

courtyard over the heads of grooms, footmen, and rustics. And all the feminine parts should be played by boys, just as in Shakespeare's days. It would be a good idea to sign that new child sensation, George Bascom O'Reilly; George Bascom O'Reilly as Juliet or Ophelia or Portia! Of course, it might be comic, grotesque, but it would be interesting, too.

Thinking of how much there was to discuss and plan and decide about all this, Alfred felt a wave of preliminary exhaustion. How hard he worked! And how ill he felt most of the time! The doctors had been able to do nothing for him. They simply told him he was all right! He did not believe them. There were more subtle ailments than those transcribed by an imperfect functioning of heart or lungs or liver. There were things that had nothing to do with blood pressure or metabolism. He was the one who was ill, he ought to know! Right now he was conscious of an irritating feeling of acidity. As he never ate lunch, it must be the result of something he had eaten last evening. His head, too, had a heavy, deadened feeling. Of course, he had slept late. But that ringing in his ears which had bothered him the last day or so was still going on. What could that possibly mean?

His face took on the dejected, harassed expression of the hypochondriac. He crossed to the water cooler, half filled a paper cup, and opening a large, oak cabinet that stood against one wall, at once disclosed a principal element of his character, like Bluebeard unlocking his closet, or a woman of fashion displaying rank upon rank of Paris gowns.

For there, densely cluttering two wide shelves, was a preposterous collection of bottles, jars, tubes and containers—all medicines. This assortment included the most commonplace kind of antiseptics and analgesics, as well as others much rarer, and comprised cure-alls, balms, and compounds with which to combat nearly every popular disease. Some bore the prescription stickers of obliging doctors, but most of them were merely proprietary preparations. These things, however, no longer bore catchy or colloquial names as they had only a decade or so ago; now they owned intimidating,

chemical titles, and their white labels were as severe as possible in their assertion of science.

Rubbing his stomach anxiously now with a vulgar, circular movement of his thick hand, he scrutinized his collection sternly before making a choice. Then tilting some tablets from one bottle into his palm, he carried them to his mouth, and next, adding some effervescent compound to the paper cup of water he was holding, he washed them down with this. He stood looking gravely towards his belly, with an effect of listening. Then he belched loudly, and relaxing with a satisfied air, padded back to his desk.

But even now he did not want to begin. He did not want to press the buzzer that would announce that he had arrived, that would summon Maury Meyer from the outer office, and plunge him at once into the strain of exacerbating effort. He held his head for a moment in his hands with a mournful air, and presently his eyes strayed to the five familiar pictures grouped about his desk.

They were all portraits of the same subject, a young girl barely more than seventeen. She was rather pretty in spite of her prominent, fleshy nose. Her eyes were big and full of confident directness. Her lower lip was heavy and inviting. She was apparently quite blonde, and this was odd, for she was Alfred Zacharias' daughter.

She was also the only person whom he unreservedly loved, admired, and even revered. He and Myra had had only two children. The boy, Alvin, was still in the smart preparatory school into which Alfred had somehow managed to insinuate him, and there, slighted and ostracized, was learning those lessons of bitter resentment which Alfred himself had learned more simply in a slum. Yet for some reason Zacharias was not especially interested in him.

But he did not feel like this about Flora. From the time she had been a little girl he had surrendered to a violent devotion to her that he did not even make the slightest attempt to conceal. For a while he had been troubled that she might not be pretty, and when at last she became so, he

was filled with a complex exultation. It was all he could do to avoid bringing attention constantly to her good points. She had nice straight legs. Her shoulders were rather square, yet there was something fragile about them. When she smiled, the effect was bewitching. The charm of that smile was that it was full of instinctive sexual enticement of which she herself was perfectly innocent. Alfred was wildly jealous of her and at the same time furious at anyone who did not instantly fall down and worship her.

He loaded her down with presents and favours, and to please her was his highest satisfaction. It was a great wonder she had not become insufferable. Instead, she merely forgave him for his absurdity. And Alfred was not her enemy, even though he was her passionate lover. Like all intensities of the first rank, there was something a little morbid in his feeling. Nevertheless, his veiled incestuousness did not obliterate his practicality and his good will. He knew she would be certain to marry young, and he had the greatest dreams for her there. She must make a magnificent marriage, he would see to that! But who was worthy of her? Who was good enough for her? Money and brains and handsome looks were not sufficient to buy her. Well, there would be someone, some young man, but he would have to have everything!

And this Summer, less than a month from now, he was going to take her abroad alone with him while he negotiated for exchanges of London productions and looked at actors and theatres. Afterwards they would have a real vacation together, just the two of them. He had never looked forward to anything half so much as the moment when, with their arms locked together, he and Flora would stand at the rail near their Class A staterooms while the gangplank went hurtling back on its screaming rollers, and on the air rose the deafening hoarse blast of the siren that pretended each mechanical voyage was a high Argosy.

Zacharias smiled. He felt better now. It was that last drug, of course. He made a note in his mind to take some

more the next time he felt out of sorts this way. And now he rang the buzzer.

Maury Meyer came in. He came in with such promptness as to suggest that he had been waiting with his shoulder to the door for the summons.

He was thin, tall, and haggard, with a complexion so bad as to be repellent. His nails were bitten atrociously. He seldom smiled, and his words were so rapidly propelled in a rusty voice as nearly to be unintelligible.

Though he had come to Alfred a number of years ago, he was still a young man. On that first occasion he had practically forced his way into the office. He had apparently been magnetized by Alfred's reputation, and taking it for granted that this really represented what it claimed, he arrived with an admiration in which there was not the slightest uncertainty. He was more violent in his beliefs than Alfred had ever been. He seemed to carry the Revolution in his pocket, so to speak. His excited eyes at once warned and sneered that this was only a matter of moments now.

Alfred had been amused by him and his deadly seriousness. Perhaps, too, he had an inkling that here was someone who would serve him blindly and fanatically. He took Maury on, and in less than three months had reason to congratulate himself. For young Meyer, for all his devotion to such abstract principles as social justice and the liberation of the masses, did not let these interfere in the least with his harsh personal relationships with individuals. He revealed an uncanny skill in battering down actors' salaries, he was feline in his casual dropping of threats, his assumption of bored indifference about things he wanted very much. He spared Alfred much wearisome detail. It was at first astonishing to ask for something difficult to be done and learn then that it had been done already; with time this came to be taken for granted, like air, sunlight, and other good things.

Only the other day, for instance, Maury had been extraordinarily useful in a trifling matter with all his usual speed.

This was when Myra and Flora had been ready to leave the city and open up the place in the Catskills. But on this occasion Myra had flatly refused to go to all that effort by herself. She declared scornfully she would stay on in the apartment in the heat in preference. One could not get any really reliable help up there, the farmers were all insufferably independent. Why, they would not even do things for money! And the prospect of opening up that big house, of seeing that the water and the power were functioning again, that the Winter refuse was gathered up and burned, the Summer screens put in, the hammocks strung up, the porch furniture set out, and the thousand and one other details, petty or laborious, attended to, was formidable. No, said Myra, she would not go at all unless Alfred could manage to send up someone ahead of her, or along with her, to handle all these preliminary bothers.

Zacharias had merely transferred the problem to Maury, who had nodded rapidly once or twice, and on the very next day had showed up in the office with David Loewinthal, who he said could spare a day or two and would be glad to help. That the young man was, of course, an active Communist went without saying, since Maury had unearthed him. Maury scorned to know any other kind of human being.

But even without that plain guide, Alfred would have had no difficulty in guessing as much after one look at him. Loewinthal was extremely handsome, with sharp, bold features. Obviously he did not have a penny, yet did not in the least mind this. Looking at him shrewdly and genially, Alfred felt that he was looking at some young Jewish bard. Certainly his whole cast and manner suggested the poet.

And as a matter of fact, it turned out presently that Loewinthal was a sort of sub-editor on one of the prominent Communist organs. Though he treated Alfred with all the respect due to someone who for nearly twenty years had let himself be publicly identified as a firm Leftist, he was exceedingly sure of himself.

He spoke a kind of jargon, full of casual allusions with

which Alfred was only vaguely familiar. Uneasy at the possibility of being found out, Alfred answered principally with knowing nods and sympathetic murmurs. Often this same feeling of inadequacy struck at him. How things had changed! How the movement had developed! How much vaster, more intellectualized, more aware and formidable it had become since its crude expression in his day!

Nevertheless, he regarded David Loewinthal, with his fine features and zealot's eyes, a little tenderly, thinking to himself that he, too, had once been exactly like this. Yet not exactly either! The young man before him had a quietly fixed look that disagreeably seemed to say his predilection was far more. It was possible he might even go on like that always. Idealists, some people called such men. Fools, others.

When Alfred asked what he would like for his services in a task so beneath him, Loewinthal merely smiled and waved off all suggestion of payment.

Thinking him more of a fool than ever, Alfred shook his hand gratefully. Then he despatched him to the apartment to be interviewed by Myra and put himself at her disposal. And it was, in fact, the very next morning that Myra and Flora had started off with David Loewinthal in the flashy Dusenbergs with its chromium fittings and red-leather upholstery. Alfred had risen early, and in a dressing gown and with eyes puffed with sleep, had watched them off. He saw Flora's exquisite legs twinkling past, and a tremor went through him.

"Now mind," he said fiercely, "whatever you do, drive slow!"

He had had a card from Myra yesterday saying that they had arrived safely. "Up to our necks in work," she wrote, "but Loewinthal perfectly wonderful—doing everything I want. All well here."

So that was another trifle that Maury had accomplished; you could trust completely not only him, but anyone he recommended. Alfred looked up at him approvingly now, standing in front of him with his head bent as if in meekness,

yet at the same time with something about the tilt of it on his neck that suggested a carrion bird about to dip its beak in gore.

"That Professor Mapleson's here," said Maury in his hoarse tones. "Oswald Bent, too. They've been waiting an hour." He gave a low sound that conveyed an idea of obscure satisfaction. "Will you see them now?"

Alfred nodded. "But let's have a look at this mail first."

His aspect of indolence had fallen away. Now that he was in action, his face expressed unbounded energy, alertness, and determination. The mail today was not unusually heavy. There were cables of inquiry from England regarding American rights; a rewritten third act of a new play on which he had taken an option and which by now he disliked intensely; the usual requests from friends and acquaintances for "a little part" for a daughter or a mistress (how would they like it if he were forever bedevilling them to employ people who, nine times out of ten, were not only incompetent, but might actually ruin their businesses?); a letter from some lawyer or other threatening still another preposterous suit for plagiarism; a reply from the Weinstaubs naming their fantastic sharing terms for their theatre chain; a note from an actress with whom he had had a love affair (Had he? He could not remember), asking for money; a three-page night telegram concerning a dispute between a stagehands' union and the Chicago company of one of the two plays he now had running (He would show those bastards before he was through! The play itself was about a transportation strike and fiercely pro-union); a long document in twisted English from a group of refugee Viennese Jews patronizingly offering their services for a repertoire season under his management; and various other run-of-the-mill letters, mostly from actors and authors, and hence mostly about nothing.

Zacharias, shuffling through all these with great rapidity, and pausing only now and then to direct a stare of cold

consideration at any about which there was the least hesitation, slid them over one by one to Maury, with a brief muttered direction which was perhaps not even necessary. In some cases he passed them silently, such as those letters that requested small parts for protégés. Maury bit his nails as he listened, then gathered the mail up, nodding. His face, spotted with pimples and blackheads, had an ugly, voracious look. There was no doubt that his replies would be as disagreeable as possible. He went out, and Zacharias leaned back in his chair with the contentment of a finished task. Then in a moment the door was again opened and Professor Mapleson and Oswald Bent came in together.

Professor Mapleson, somewhat cadaverous, had a stooped, scholarly air which he aggravated by the harmless affectation of a pince-nez. You could pick out at once those small traits and mannerisms that had rendered him an immediate campus personality and had been assiduously cultivated by him ever since. However, he was solidly noted for his Shakespearean researches, and it was for this reason that Zacharias had got in touch with him.

Oswald Bent, who had come in with him, had been summoned with the same purpose in view. He was well known as a "mental" actor, a lean, dark-haired man whose emaciated, dyspeptic appearance invariably evoked the critical comment that he was sardonic. Having no great looks to display, he had established in their place the simulacrum of terrific intellect, and it could not be said that he did not give a good performance.

The two had not met as yet, and Zacharias, rising to shake hands, introduced them. He had learned from much experience to be a persuasive talker, but before beginning he now looked them over quickly.

It was perfectly clear that Mapleson was impressed at finding himself in so worldly a place as a popular manager's office. Surveying him half scornfully, Alfred reflected that there, but for the grace of God, sat he; only not a quarter so successful. Yes, that was the fate he had escaped when he

had been so lucky as to lose his head in that faculty investigation long years ago.

But Oswald Bent was perhaps even less enviable. He had dropped gracefully into a chair, smiling, while at the same time retaining his disillusioned, intellectual frown. Actors were a race, surely, more than a profession—a race that would somehow have existed even if there had been no theatre invented for them.

Alfred glanced from Bent to Mapleson and back again. They were undoubtedly afraid of each other. And it was difficult now to say which was acting the harder—Mapleson as the man of the world, or Bent as someone almost frightening with erudition.

Alfred cleared his throat and began to talk.

Bent and Mapleson were gone. Alone, Alfred stood in front of his improvised dispensary studying his shelves of medicines. His throat felt rasped from nearly ceaseless smoking, nearly ceaseless talking. An indefinable ache permeated every part of him, as though his arteries carried not his life blood but only a stream of pain. What ought he to take? Was there anything that would help him get rid of this sensation? He was filled with distaste for something he had earlier been looking forward to: the party of half a dozen interesting men whom he had invited to his apartment this evening for one of his famous dinners prepared by himself.

He wondered dispiritedly why he became tired out so quickly these days. His energy, bursting at first like a geyser, soon evaporated weakly like water in the desert. He had talked brilliantly about his original Shakespearean production to Mapleson and Bent until they had both become excited. As their enthusiasm mounted, his own decreased, and in a reaction he began to wonder whether, after all, the whole try was not absurd and he was not merely going to make a fool of himself.

Why wouldn't people let him alone? He had proved long

ago that he was clever, and he had made money. Why was it necessary to do it all over again? Towards the end of the conference he had stared at Mapleson and Bent with downright hatred. He wished that they would get out of here; he wished they would go away somewhere and die and burn in hell.

And all the time Maury had kept switching phone calls through to him. Of course, they were calls he had to answer: rich acquaintances, important people whom he did not wish to offend, usually asking for free tickets as a matter of course; calls from actresses, playwrights, agents, and from other managers; and from one of the men who was coming to dinner tonight; and from a party of friends, quite drunk, on the largest, newest liner in mid-Atlantic; and from Uncle Harry Silverstein in Hollywood, who was now producing pictures there and seemed to have put through his expensive call chiefly for the purpose of boasting about something or other.

Alfred had had to meet the impact of all these differing personalities, demands and futile encroachments, with rapidly switching attitudes of his own. He had to purr with respect, or talk as though amorously; he had to bully, be jocular, curt, cynical, and sympathetic by turns; it exasperated him, the effort to live up to what people thought of him.

He suddenly wondered if he were growing old. But surely it wasn't that; it was just that he had become wise enough at last to realize it wasn't really worth the price—unless that was the same thing as growing old!

But rid of Myra, too, he now stood with a sense of physical distress before his medicine bottles, pondering. Just then the phone began to jangle nervously once more. In panic, as if the receiver had the power to detach itself and clamp itself to his ear, Zacharias dropped the first bottle of tablets at hand into his pocket, snatched up his hat, and fled through the private entrance at the rear.

Outside on the street he breathed more easily. It was scarcely five o'clock and the light still held in the delicate

air. He pushed his way through the shuffling crowds and crossed Broadway. At that moment, as he was passing the theatre where one of his two productions this season was still lingering, his eyes made out a stout, familiar figure halfway down the block. It was another successful producer, a man whom he rather liked. But exactly as if he owed him money, Zacharias slipped into the lobby, pulled open a heavy door, and disappeared into the dark, soundless auditorium.

He sat down. It was peculiarly peaceful in here. Pulling out the bottle of tablets he had abstracted from the shelves in his office, he struck a match and read the label. He had made a lucky snatch, it was some benzedrine sulphate. He broke a tablet in two, along its demarcation line, and chewed and swallowed the half. Then he stared mournfully towards the solitary, unshaded pilot light glaring in the center of the stage on its metal stalk like a microphone on fire. It threw a garish hue over the single setting of the play that would be performed here once more tonight. The backing, the bright, sweet colours, the furniture, had a tawdry look. They suggested a box of stale, cheap candy.

His melancholy continued to inundate him in waves. There was, of course, a certain comfort in being here alone like this, invisible as though on another star, in a place where no one could possibly find him, yet it was a sad comfort, too. He felt as though he were meditating in his own tomb. In the wings somewhere a faint tapping sound could be heard and the noise of a couple of distant, drowsy voices. But these only picked against the inscrutable quiet.

Gazing toward the stage, he recalled his efforts with this particular production. It had not been so long ago, yet already everything about it seemed dim to him. It was easier to remember his first production, far, far back. On the opening night of Jacob Eagle's play he had sat in the last row of a theatre like this one, clutching Myra's fingers. He had turned pale when people had laughed at the wrong places, and had licked his dry mouth when some of the big,

exciting scenes failed to come off. Nevertheless, the play had caught on in a way that he never dreamed of, in a way that surpassed even Eagle's expectations in spite of his own loud, preliminary bragging. The curtain had gone up, the curtain had come down; and in two swift hours Zacharias drank in the exultant realization that he had made his fortune, he had attained money, power, and fame. He had listened greedily to congratulations in the lobby afterwards; a number of well-known people had seemed suddenly anxious to meet him; then when the theatre was all dark and even the dressing-rooms empty, he and Myra had gone to Ruben's for a sandwich and a cup of coffee. Myra had patted his damp hand. He remembered it well, even the tone of her voice, the glitter of her enigmatic eyes, and his own surprise as she had said:

"Now you know why I married you! When you were clever enough to get yourself out of that college instructorship, and go after something that would really pay you, I saw you were all right!"

It seemed a long time ago when she had said that . . . it seemed yesterday. He had known at last what she really thought of his socialistic ideals. But it had not discomfited him. In a way, he almost admired her. How strange it was to think how he had once suffered over her! All that was burned out and gone long ago. She could not ever again make him suffer like that.

Very soon they had had no illusions about each other of any kind. They let each other alone, however. Myra had her music, her musical friends, her sterile enjoyment of her own ironic mind. Paradoxically they liked each other for their mutual selfishness and unconcern. He was fond of Myra as he might have been fond of a view. She was practical, she did not make any mistakes. She had her own doctors, her own personal pleasures. He did not have to do anything about her. She was an excellent wife, just as he was an excellent husband. Did he not give her everything she wanted?

The benzedrine which he had swallowed only a few moments ago began to react on him. His brain seemed suddenly to be speeding with a kind of lightness and impatience. He no longer felt tired. His recollections became infused with sentimental vividness. A smile curved his mouth in the darkness.

It was that first production, of course, which had brought him a simple and powerful knowledge. He had realized with surprise that it is not necessary to know anything, especially, in order to make money; it is necessary merely to hire other people who do. And so frightened, so indolent was everyone, so oddly anxious to be slaves instead of masters, that it was even possible to hire them out of their own money, or with promises of a portion of their own profits!

At a bound he had perceived the advantage of simply being in charge, of becoming what was grandiloquently called "a creative producer." With satisfaction he saw he was already given credit for the very ideas of the play he had produced, exactly as if these ideas were his own and he had invented them. It was probably a dim apprehension of this peculiar and quite undeserved credit, even more than the hope of colossal gain, which made so many quite untalented men long to produce plays.

In the excitement of his first success, thunderstruck at the money that was now effortlessly pouring in from half a dozen related sources, he had revised, also, certain of those convictions with which he had produced it. He had undertaken it with a pure fervour. The realization that he had instead given a great many people a great deal of entertainment seemed somehow to make the passionate message itself curiously less important. For Jacob Eagle was, by accident, a real playwright. Alfred had produced several more of his works, and though none was as successful as the first, Eagle had gained a large reputation before he had disappeared forever in Hollywood. It was strange that Eagle had let that happen to him. Perhaps he, also, with all that money, could not arouse in himself any longer the fury and

resentment against his own underprivileged existence which in his leaner days had filled his plays with such tension.

Alfred himself, without knowing how it had come about, was soon principally concerned with being sure of putting on a success. A quick, early failure had frightened him, and he saw that he must not let that happen again! After all, you couldn't preach the greatest truth ever uttered if people wouldn't stay to listen! And because the tricks of making people stay were so much more difficult and so much more challenging, it was natural enough to concentrate chiefly on them, instead of whatever ideas they had originally been intended to convey.

Luck was with him—a whole series of lucky strokes—defeat itself turning into the giddiest victory on several occasions when he had actually despaired of it. His presentation of abuses of the capitalistic system began to be much admired.

And it was odd that he had been able to build a fortune upon such ideas. Even a decade earlier it could not possibly have happened. Perhaps in the facile prosperity which had followed the war, people had felt vaguely contrite, conscience-stricken, and had wanted to go to the theatre to be rebuked. Perhaps in the waves of depression afterwards, they had wanted to go still, hoping for a solution or at least an explanation of the mysterious universal calamity. At any rate, they had come in numbers to Alfred's plays during both eras.

It was good to be so rich and so admired. Alfred was wise enough never to desert the principles on which he had founded his success. All his plays were plays of protest, even the comedies, but it was no longer the protest that mattered. Yet he had no idea that he himself had changed; he was not introspective; he simply thought with one half of his brain, and spoke with the other half.

Of course, even with his prodigious luck, it had not been easy. As he sat here in the dark, still emptiness, a flood of mingled memories poured over him pell-mell: the dead,

musty smell of a certain dressing-room in Atlantic City where a drunken actor had knocked him down; the uproars, confusions, treacheries, vanities, the hope and the despondency that had blended days and nights together during try-outs on the road; the countless acquaintances he had made, with their convincing semblance of friendship, and the noisy enmities that had been scarcely more serious. Oh, he had worked hard! Entertaining the public was the most serious business in the world. But there was ample compensation for those who won. Alfred had won. In the first five years he had swiftly become a rich man.

In due course, however, even riches had become commonplace, though symbolized by custom-built cars, a cruising power-boat, his immense wardrobe, Myra's jewels, his succession of mistresses, his place in Florida, his other homes, and his children's imported nurses and governesses. In time such things as these lost their savour; they passed before one like pleasant dreams, and he was not able to lift his spirits, as he had often before, by gloating privately over his own opulence and splendour. The best he could now say about success was that it was better than failure.

Of course, there had been much satisfaction in coming grandly to the rescue of his family in those first rewarding years. His mother and father were dead now, but he had given them everything in their last days. Naturally he had enjoyed doing this; he had enjoyed showing off in front of them and admiring his own warm heart, and pretending to be more extravagant and even richer than he was. His father, the little tailor, had accepted this attitude meekly, as if conceit and snobbery were also the privileges of riches. But his mother had been less impressed. She had sniffed scornfully, and frequently made derisory remarks worthy of Uncle Harry himself. Zacharias had never been able to get around her. Far more flattering was the fury that had seized Uncle Harry. His eyes were pools of indignant envy. He slapped Alfred on the back as if he did this only to keep from punching him instead. He studied his nephew with

tense dark eyes, as if trying to find out exactly how he had done it. Probably it was this jealousy and competitiveness which in the end had sent Uncle Harry to Hollywood to produce pictures there. Now and then he would be in the East, and, calling on Alfred, would say:

"How much is this new play going to cost you, Alfred—ten thousand—twenty, maybe? It's a nice little piece of money for a play! Not like pictures, of course. Now in this here 'Saints and Sinners' what I am going to do, maybe I will spend three, or maybe four hundred thousand dollars!"

"Of whose money?" Alfred would ask politely.

Uncle Harry would choke with wrath. After that he never ceased to say hard things about Alfred, but he never neglected to make it very clear at the same time that they were related.

"Mind, I ain't saying that boy ain't smart," Uncle Harry would affirm. "Didn't I teach him myself? Sure, right after I dragged him out of a submarine, for which, by the way, I never got paid one nickel back!"

The rest of the family had drifted away, in one fashion or another. Alfred seldom saw his brothers or sisters any more. One or two of them had tried to borrow money from him and cheat him, and there had been quarrels. They hated him, probably.

He had no one, no one except Flora.

He sighed and pulled out his watch. But it was too dark to see it and too much bother to strike another match. Still it must be time to go, since he had to prepare one of his celebrated dinners. He swallowed the remaining half of the benzedrine tablet and started out.

A cab took him to the big apartment on upper Fifth Avenue. When he had first leased the place a number of years ago, he had swelled with pride. It had fulfilled his utmost dreams of youthful grandeur to live in such a neighbourhood and such a place. All the rooms had been decorated lavishly and differently. One was a Persian room, with brass chests, prayer rugs, and ornamental brocades. It

was a little oppressive in there. Guests lowered their voices as if entering a museum when they peered inside. Yes, it was rather like living in a museum. The other rooms, too, had characters and styles of their own. But nearly all of them were dim and voluptuous like the private apartments of a caliph.

Alfred let himself in and made his way directly to the kitchen. The servants had followed Myra to the country on the train, with the exception of Ling, the Chinese, who had been left behind to take care of him.

Ling was now busy carrying out the instructions Alfred had given him before leaving this morning. Over his head were rows of old French saucepans of burnished copper. But there were also all the latest devices within reach, giving the place the aspect of a laboratory.

Alfred examined what Ling was doing, and then, putting on a chef's apron, went to work himself. His face was more cheerful now. He looked engrossed.

He had left the minor details to Ling. The special melons had already been prepared and were chilling in the oversize refrigerator with limes and tiny slivers of Westphalian ham beside them. Zacharias set Ling carving out orange shells for *café diablo*, and began himself to prepare the principal course, a Mediterranean dish of chicken and shellfish in which he had interpolated ideas of his own. He covered the bottom of an enormous iron saucepan with Spanish oil, and spilled in a generous amount of unwashed rice, cooking it gently until it took on a pale fawn colour. Now drumsticks and breasts of young chicken went in. Then the meat of several lobsters, some handfuls of freshly boiled jumbo shrimp and some clams still in their shells, together with garden peas and tinned pimentos. From one of Ling's stock-pots he poured in enough consomme to cover everything, and began adding pinch after pinch of seemingly incongruous herbs and spices, a little parsley and thyme, a teaspoonful of nutmeg, plenty of saffron, some dill, a dusting of curry, and an ounce of brown sugar. Setting the cover on as soon

as it was bubbling, he turned the fire down and allowed it to steam slowly.

Leaving Ling to attend to the rest, Zacharias went into his bedroom and began to change his things. He bathed in tepid, scented water, lying in the tub a long time. Then he put on a dinner jacket over a soft shirt. It had been well tailored, yet it did not become him. Nevertheless he looked at himself with satisfaction in the glass.

About seven the hall chimes rang for the first arrivals. J. B. Weisenthal, the investment banker, and his house guest, Joel Hertzburg, the eminent refugee author, came in together. Then in another minute or so there appeared in a clump, Bernard Samuels, proprietor of the famous art gallery bearing his name; the great Continental stage director, Saul Richenstein, and young Elias Fink, who was reputed to be throwing away a million a year of his vast brewery inheritance on the development of the ballet.

Ling brought in the cocktails and some pungent appetizers of imported goose liver, Kieles spraten, and fresh caviar; and the party began.

It was clear they were all highly successful men, and peculiarly intelligent men, whose restless desire for the best had led them finally to the cultivation of the most refined, the most precious and elaborate tastes. It seemed at first incongruous, and something no other race, no other class, possessed: this combining of the most astute materialism with a fondness for all those arts and learnings that appear to be conditioned by the purest idealistic aspiration; but presently it could be seen that about this there was nothing odd or contradictory. For their admiration for art had no actual connection with the pretences of aspiration, but remained honestly sensuous; and was, perhaps, astute and practical still in the recognition that those things which have the greatest value are, paradoxically, materially worthless, and obtain their high value only from the eye of the beholder. Then, too, beauty is often portable, and in times of stress may even depreciate less than currency.

But the most marked common characteristic of these men whom Alfred chose to pretend were his friends was an astonishing snobbery, a snobbery founded not upon one fancied superiority, but upon a consciousness of the possession of all of them, and which would not have been possible had they not been Jews also. They were cleverer than other men, that was what their brilliant and sleepy eyes said; cleverer and more gifted and more aristocratic, jaded from long experience of tangible good things, yet realistically accepting as fact that no more than that was to be had.

They basked in one another's presence here, as though recognizing their mutual fellowship in a rare, exclusive society. Yet even as they admired one another in a kind of humorous comprehension, they exhibited also those mannerisms of disdain by which they sought to remind most others of their own illimitable superiority.

They were now talking nearly at the same time, listening sharply while pretending to hear nothing. Weisenthal and Bernard Samuels were discussing in slurring tones a recent immense transaction in paintings; Fink, a rather effeminate young man, was marking all they said with a scornfulness belied by his intentness; the two foreigners, German nationals both, were pushing their personalities into focus with an extraordinary insensitiveness and obviousness: the author, Hertzburg, wearing an immense Windsor tie with his dinner clothes, and protruding, as if with a desire for hypnotic effect, eyes that bugged out already without effort; and Richenstein, the impresario, holding spread fingers in front of his face and staring at all the others in a kind of foolish declaration of his unconventionality and his profundity of soul.

The Chinese servant appeared again, bowing, and they moved, still chatting, into Alfred's handsome dining room, where the heavy silver and selected glass poured back the light of a fine chandelier in a fountain of reflections.

The dinner was a great success, Alfred's concoction winning exclamations from all, with its rice puffed up with

absorbed flavours and enveloping the blended chicken and shellfish. He sat back smiling, deprecating the compliments for his little hobby.

"When I'm ruined in the theatre for my Communist opinions, I'll come to one of you for a job as chef."

"If I could only be sure of that," said J. B. Weisenthal, helping himself to more, "I'd ruin you myself tomorrow."

Afterward they returned to the living room to drink coffee that had been mixed with spices and heated liqueurs, and was served in cups fitted with orange skins. Then Ling brought in the special oversize cigars and the bottle of Napoleon brandy, and the men of superior privileges softly and contentedly relaxed in the lulling process of digestion.

There was no need of games or other ritualized entertainment; they thoroughly enjoyed themselves as they were. But the air nevertheless crackled with the possibilities of mutual advantage, with Bernard Samuels, perhaps, considering the hope of grooming Weisenthal as a great collector, and Alfred wondering whether Hertzburg might not have a play up his sleeve for him some time or other, and Richenstein doubtless thinking whether or not Alfred in turn might not be the means to a production of one of his pretentious and celebrated spectacles.

They did not talk of these things directly, but instead told stories about themselves that in one way or another attested to their extraordinary talents, or shrewdness, or importance. It came Alfred's turn at last, J. B. Weisenthal going out of his way to give him the opportunity as if in appreciation for the excellent dinner. Weisenthal's face was pink and dewy like a hothouse fruit. There was something rich about the contentment that now oozed out of him. He waved his cigar genially.

"Alfred, before we leave, I want you to tell Joel Hertzburg here the story of how you were thrown out of your university job years ago. If some of the others have heard it before, they can stand it once more, I guess."

Zacharias smiled with an air of tender self-mockery. The

smile, too, went with that familiar story, whose words, whose accompanying gestures, were now so fixed and stylized as to seem like an unvarying scene in one of his productions.

It could not be denied that he told the mild story well. It had the pathos of experience looking back upon the recklessness of its own beginnings: the young man, so absurdly ardent, with his passionate classroom appeals to men still younger; the inevitable hour of persecution; the long-forgotten trial with its stuffy, outraged judges; and that final callow outburst which had seemingly precipitated ruin, and brought instead success; the reward of courage and honesty, of course. With an appreciative, self-derisory laugh, a relishing headshake for the silly, touching fellow he had then been, Zacharias gave it all a tender warmth. Yet somehow he managed to convey the impression that though he used wiser methods now, he had lost none of his first idealistic convictions.

They were all smiling when he was through; their glances seemed to rest upon him with the respect due to a man of indeed idealistic convictions who had nevertheless not allowed these to overrule his common sense, whose theories attacked the unequal distribution of riches, but who lived in such an apartment as this and had given them the dinner they had had tonight.

It was late. There was not much more to be said. There began a general movement to go. Alfred shook hands all around, accepting thanks for the agreeable evening. Weisen-thal suggested lunch next week. Both Hertzburg and Richenstein murmured an intention to drop in at his office soon. Fink and Samuels were cordial.

Alfred stood in the hall after the door had closed, with the conventional smile of cordiality still lingering on his mouth. He felt carried along by the tide of his own success—why, he was on top of the world; he had everything, no one could go any farther!

But switching off the lights, and wandering into his bedroom, his brief satisfaction began to recede stealthily once

more. How nervous he felt! He experienced the disagreeable combination of being very tired yet sharply wide awake. Perhaps that benzedrine was still working in him. He would have to take some nembutal to offset it. He went into his bathroom at once, found a capsule of the sedative and swallowed it. He undressed, got into some silk pyjamas, and dropped into bed. In the darkness his eyes rolled. His brain picked over the party. His pleasure in it was quite gone. What a waste of time, of effort! What did it mean in the end? And why did he prepare elaborate dishes that were always certain to disagree with him? He needed some bismuth, perhaps, or kaolin. But he was too weary to get up, and he lay still, hoping that the feeling of oppressiveness would wear off by itself.

Gradually the nembutal he had taken began to fill him with torpor. He felt as though he were watching from a little distance his own drowsiness advancing upon him. Then he was asleep.

All at once he was violently awake again, though still stupefied. After a moment he was aware that the telephone at his bedside was insistently ringing. He sat up miserably, put the light on, and reached for the receiver. Then with that inscrutable instinct which often prepares the mind for danger on the unseen side of a locked door, the blankness left his brain, and Alfred came to alertness with a swift feeling of alarm.

Answering, he heard Myra's cool voice at the other end:

"Did I wake you? Sorry, but still I thought you ought to know right away. Perhaps you'd better come up here tomorrow as soon as you can."

"What's happened? Is it Flora? Has something happened to her?"

"Oh, yes, something's happened to her, all right! She's fallen in love. She and that fine David Loewenthal you sent along. They haven't eloped yet, but I wouldn't put it beyond them to do so any minute now."

"Don't let them!" Alfred faltered in an imploring whisper.

"Stop them until I get there! I'll come at once—I'll come tonight! How could you let a thing like that happen?"

He heard Myra laugh; it set his teeth on edge somehow. He rang off angrily and began to reach for his clothes.

"Damn him!" he said. "Damn him! And damn Maury, too!"

Half dressed, he ran to the phone again, and called the garage where he kept his car.

"At once, do you hear!" he cried. "Get it ready at once—gas, oil, everything. I'll be there in ten minutes!"

In a few minutes he was dressed. His head was aching hard now. He would try to think later when he was driving up the Hudson through the cool night. He would think what to do. Imagine Flora's throwing herself away on this David Loewinthal, a nobody, a fool, a stupid radical agitator, who hadn't a penny and never would have one! Not while he lived, she wouldn't! Just before leaving, he swallowed a couple of aspirins to try to quiet his headache and pull his nerves down. Then he started out, banging the heavy apartment door behind him.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE SAME MAY day, mild and beneficent, had descended to a placid evening all along the North Atlantic seaboard. There was a lulling feeling in the air; it was full of the reflective sadness of peace.

On the tree-lined streets of a city in central New York State, all the birds were now still, and even the leaves scarcely rustled any longer. The earth whirled soundlessly, yet this compelled and monstrous pace could somehow be sensed in the profundity of quiet.

A car had just driven up to a large stone church whose embrasures made patches of shadow of varying depths of intensity. Two ladies of middle age stepped out, followed by a chauffeur carrying a big hamper, and by two adolescent

girls. The ladies, leading the way, walked along a gravel path to the rear of the church, and descending some steps there, began to unlock the doors opening to the basement.

They switched the lights on and entered, followed by the chauffeur and the young girls. There could be seen a bare platform at the far end of the room, and scattered all about, in an informal placing, a great many hard folding chairs. A shabby upright piano occupied one corner with a large American flag draped in folds just above it. For this was the place where the less sacred activities of the church were conducted and which served as the meeting center for its innumerable improving societies such as the Men's Club, the Ladies' Aid, the Sunday School Teachers' Bible-training Class, and various committees and organizations for foreign missions, bird study, manual training, domestic science, gymnastics, and home nursing.

The two middle-aged women proceeded down the long room to a kind of alcove at the rear, which contained a narrow work-table, several single-burner gas rings connected with rubber piping, a tap over a rusty sink, and some shelves piled with a large amount of cheap, thick crockery.

One of the women was Miss Prince, the Sunday School superintendent. She was thin, dowdy, and about forty, with faded eyes. She began at once in a fussy manner the preparations which had brought her here. The other, Mrs. Hugo Storley, stout as a robin, and with a haughty languour, contrived to look active without making a gesture to prove it. Mrs. Storley was important in the church, and she was very rich. The two young girls were hers, as was also the chauffeur, who was now setting down and opening up the hamper.

Miss Prince, keeping up a murmur of fretful, rather meaningless sounds which required no answer, began to take a number of homemade cakes out and set them on individual platters.

"Oh, dear, look at that icing! . . . Couldn't be helped, I suppose. . . . I wonder, should I cut each cake into fifteen

slices, or will ten be enough? . . . Isn't the cocoa there in the bottom? . . . Surely I didn't forget the cocoa!"

"Lucille! Thelma!" Mrs. Storley commanded her daughters, who were now giggling over some obscure, private joke. "Make yourselves useful! What would you like them to do, Miss Prince?"

"They might fill the coffeepots for me—we ought to get those ready right away."

Mrs. Storley waved her hand to signify to her children that this was an order, and sighing with simple corpulence, lowered herself into a straight-backed chair and looked solemnly all around her.

"We will miss Mr. Mallory," she said heavily.

Miss Prince was engaged in measuring the coffee into the large galvanized pots that the Storley girls were fetching her from the sink.

"We should all be glad for his sake," she answered primly, without looking up. "No one ever needed a rest more than that poor man. How tired he looks! And how wonderful it will be for him to see England, France, Italy! It's the least the church could do to give him this vacation."

Mrs. Storley considered the spinster with some steadiness.

"Poor old thing!" she thought. "She's in love with Mr. Mallory! At her age! And with a figure like a board! I suppose it's really pathetic; one ought to feel sorry for her. . . ."

Miss Prince, with a peculiar divination about which she herself saw nothing extraordinary, at once managed to make out the trend of Mrs. Storley's reflections. She slashed into a cake viciously, wondering if Mrs. Storley had been informed yet that Hugo Storley was having a liaison with his stenographer, and had already been seen dining with her on several occasions in a roadhouse; or even if Mrs. Storley did happen to be acquainted with this fact, whether she knew also that she, Miss Prince, was likewise fully aware of it. She was just on the point of trying to convey all this information as delicately as possible, so that no man could

ever possibly have guessed what she was talking about, when the doors were opened again, and the first arrivals came trickling hesitatingly into the hall. Mrs. Storley, who had constituted herself the unofficial hostess, rose and bore down to meet them, thus escaping Miss Prince's unlaunched attack.

The few who had just arrived were principally impatient young people; and the Storley girls, who had followed their mother in curiosity, seemed to know them better than she did. Most of the young men had lofty expressions, and in spite of the disparity of their features, had something uniform about their appearance which probably resulted from the circumscribed range of their thoughts; the girls and young women, several of whom were rather pretty, appeared to share this same intense desire to belong first of all to a mass type.

Mrs. Storley found chairs for all of them, or rather forced them to find chairs for themselves, and by the time this had been done, still other arrivals had appeared, and it was clear that tonight the assembly-room would be jammed to the doors. Miss Prince, glancing out of her alcove anxiously, stopped stirring a large saucepan of cocoa which she was getting ready much in advance, to slice up the cakes into still finer slivers. For not only the church members would be represented here this evening, but many of the more prominent people in the city, though communicants of other denominations. The meeting, in fact, which was to present Adam with his expenses for the first complete vacation he had had in many years, was a general testimonial from the community whose interests he had served for so long.

They were now arriving in larger and larger numbers, filling the room with a confusion of greetings, with polite laughter, with all necessary sounds of enthusiasm, and a great showing of teeth, while everywhere chair seats were popping down with a noise like pistol shots.

And all these arrivals, it could clearly be seen, in spite of their extensive and inclusive cordiality, plainly supposed themselves to belong to quite different grades of society,

separated from one another by the sharpest divisions. They sought out their imagined kind in groups, and by means at once subtle and plain, indicated their consciousness of difference, and their singular pride in their own species.

Mayor Lully was there with his plump wife, well up in front, for he was certain to be called upon to speak this evening. Glasses perched on his small, jutting nose like a bird on a twig. His wife's full, rather graceful arms waved about a good deal, and seemed merely to be attached to her round body rather than part of it.

Back of them sat the Samuel Parkers. Mr. Parker was long, sad, and benevolent. He owned the city's principal department store, and at Christmas time, along the front of this there were always signs reading: "A Gift from Parker's Means More." Mrs. Parker's wise, gentle face was pleasantly wrinkled.

Next to them was Mr. Peter Tregaskis and his family. Mr. Tregaskis was head of the Chamber of Commerce. Whenever he met anyone, his smile was so dazzling and his handshake so emotional as to overwhelm the recipient like a declaration of love. He was an enormously fat man. There was an inevitable idea of jollity about a belly so huge.

At the very end of the row, there sat alone Mr. Arthur MacEnery, the refined undertaker, a quiet kind of man who never gave offence.

And just back of him was Miss Edgar, the choir leader, whose sensitive face carried always an expression of fixed sweetness. With her was Burton Morley, the church organist, with his shock of red hair and almost endearing irascibility. He was an odd character, of course, but were not all men of artistic talent that?

Dr. Hutchins, the popular physician, whom half the city called "old Dr. Tom," was there with his close crony, Avery Wilder, the tightlipped, dry attorney. You could not always tell when he was poking fun at you. Dr. Hutchins was a good man. He was very tall, with hunched angular shoulders, and a head that looked as if it had been hewn by some

honest artisan, and been left rough, rugged, and made to last. Avery Wilder was frail in appearance, and had a sly look. But everyone knew how honest he was. No wonder these two men were friends!

And scattered here and there were the clergymen of such other denominations as had come to honour Adam. There was the Reverend Oscar Parsons Custis, de Unitarian, a very young man and quite handsome. Rabbi Moise Benjamin was present, of course. There was something extraordinarily patient about him, sitting with his block-like body, and his expressionless black eyes. Also Anton Hoveep, who was some kind of Lutheran or other, had come this evening. His earnest face was like the passionate face of a saint. And naturally Father F. Xavier Boyle was here, too, with his big, restless mouth, small, twinkling eyes, and the knowing look that was so irresistible.

In the rear of the room sat also Mrs. Vernon Treat, with a very large party. Vernon Treat was owner of the Marathon Milling Corporation, and his wife was thus the city's social leader. There had always been Treats in Marathon. Besides, she herself was an Abernathy. Many of the humbler sort of women stole covert glances at her gown and accessories. All her clothes came from New York and from Fifty-seventh Street, moreover. She was quite beautiful. She did not look a day over thirty-five, with the Treat diamonds sparkling on her throat.

And the people with her were, of course, the best people: old Harris Hunter, the chairman of the Arathonic Country Club, with his soft white hair, a bachelor who had lived much abroad, and had the air of an elderly, old-fashioned roué; well-to-do Johnny Payson and his attractive young wife who danced so well and played bridge so well; the two Enderby girls with their vivacious cleverness and worldly wittiness (why didn't anyone marry them?); Mrs. Cora Demaine, beak-nose, black lace, rude voice and all; and others like them, just as distinguished.

Nearly everyone had arrived by now and the hall was

packed as they waited only for the guest of honour. The din of determined cheerfulness rushed on as persistently as a mountain stream. And considering them thus, as they now made the attempt to seem happy, and to be happy, and hinted by their deportment a practising of all admired social virtues, and an unwavering adherence to the ideals of Christianity, patriotism, honesty, tolerance and domestic virtue, it was possible to imagine that the thousand thousand stories and accounts of all such people were perfectly true.

They had the strength of numbers, and the delusion that truth resides in numbers. For there were hundreds of audiences like them in hundreds and hundreds of similar American towns.

Miss Prince had just set the huge container of cocoa aside, where it might be heated up again in a minute as it would be required, when she was apprised by recondite senses (for her back was turned) that the guest of honour had at last arrived.

In the din now going on, she absurdly tiptoed to the opening of the kitchen alcove, and standing there as unobtrusively as possible, sent a woman's veiled but comprehensive glance down the length of the room towards the doors.

Escorted by Mr. Jennings Lutrell, the Reverend Adam Mallory with his wife and his eldest son now entered. All were wearing those smiles which, not directed at anyone, are intended to convey a universal spirit of good will and the warmest personal pleasure. An attentive silence dropped in abrupt gradations on the room, as the party picked its way forward to the clump of chairs near the platform which Mrs. Storley had carefully reserved for them.

Mr. Lutrell was definitely in charge, guiding the others like a proud sheep dog. It was amazing how little he himself had changed in almost twenty years. His figure had long since been lost in a curve that resembled the sail of a skiff filled out by a breeze, and he had become nearly bald. But his ruddy face looked as brisk and as delighted with itself as

ever; it was still full of the unphilosophic gusto of a boy.

His face glowed with self-approbation, like an old warrior reminding the world of his own celebrated victory, for after all these years he still claimed Adam as his exclusive invention and possession. There was certainly something proprietary about the way he guided the Mallorys firmly to their seats.

Antoinette came first but without hurry. It could not be said that her deep, placid charm had altered either, but although this had quietly marched on, it had long since left her body behind. It was possible to admit vacantly that no doubt she had been a very attractive girl, without actually believing this: one would have gaped stupefied had the clock been turned back, and she could have suddenly appeared as she once was. For how, by such trifling alterations, could her early haunting loveliness have been transmuted to this forthright plainness? There was no colour in Antoinette's hair any more. The delicate blue iris of her serene eyes seemed to have streaked into the whites like a dye that has not washed well. Her bosom was simply formidable and efficient-looking; and all her curves had lost their tormenting subtlety. No man would ever have considered her stupidity adorable any more. She had been forced to fall back, like a knight into his keep, with his castle burning all around him, into the last expedient of the simulation of mere goodness.

Young Ralph Mallory gallantly assisted his mother with a curved arm, and a bent, considerate head. He was not very tall. There was something neat about him. Everyone said how splendid it was that he was going to follow in his father's footsteps and become a clergyman, too. Still, he was not at all like his father. He was a very certain young man. His mouth shut like a trap upon iniquities that had not trapped him, and would never have a chance! His features, his clothes, even his manner, were self-descriptive, like a kind of heraldic device that declared to all onlookers his high ideals.

Miss Prince's eye had flitted automatically over these first three, and now her gaze came to rest and remained fixed upon Adam. Miss Prince was not the first woman who had stared as zestfully as that.

It was not that he was handsome, though his hair, now streaked with grey, lent him effectiveness, and you saw that he was strong still.

But in the unaltered earnestness of his gaunt, ravaged head there was something obscurely touching, if possibly a little comic. Here was someone who took life more seriously than death. What was most provocative of all was the enigmatic quality of his expression.

Miss Prince, whose solution for existence was, of course, love, thought only of the tragic blunder fate had made in permitting him to have married such a woman as his wife. She trembled to imagine how much better off he would have been with her, how happy she could surely have made him. For Miss Prince was quite as pure in her own idealism, with that obstinate faith in the unalterable efficacy of her solution, which, flying in the face of every scrap of evidence and reason, has at least the nobility of all doomed causes.

And now, taking her distressed eyes away, she saw that Mr. Lutrell, with his engaging smile that said he was not to be trusted and was proud of it, was already mounting a little stiffly to the platform. The speeches would begin in a moment, after Mr. Lutrell had described once more how he and no other had picked Adam Mallory out of a ridiculously obscure rustic church those long, long years ago. Then Rabbi Benjamin would deliver a few words about the brotherhood of man, which Adam exemplified so admirably, and all the others would pay him standardized tributes. After that the cocoa and the coffee and the cake would be handed around, and probably lively Johnny Payson would take over the piano, with his good-natured, derisive grin, and all those who had stayed on would sing those outmoded pieces that were still described as "college songs." And sometime during this, Miss Prince thought with a quickening heart, she would

find the opportunity to say a word to Adam all alone, and to wish him a happy voyage with such meek, adoring eyes that he would remember that look, perhaps, long after he had forgotten the evening itself.

Mr. Lutrell, roving the platform as he dug a hand into a pocket and rattled some change there like a rosary, cleared his throat a couple of times.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began in his husky, barking voice, "We all know why we are here tonight. We all know..."

The party was over at last. Adam, with Antoinette and Ralph, walked silently across the grass to the manse. He was tired, for it was late. Yet he was intensely wide-awake also, for he had kept on drinking the coffee Miss Prince unceasingly brought him in a deliberate cultivation of that state of agitated nerves which can pass for enthusiasm.

He was glad he did not need to say a word to Antoinette about the party. She herself was droning on in a familiar, erratic monologue, to which he did not even have to listen. The tone of her voice told him what she was thinking. But he did not need to pay any attention to that either. He stared at the back of Ralph's head just ahead of him, and plodded on the rest of the short distance as though it were a mile.

He wondered why he felt so flat and exhausted, why he wanted to put the evening out of his thoughts as rapidly as possible, even while he continued to think about it. There was a stale taste in his mouth like the physical expression of his mood.

Yet everything had gone off splendidly. Damn it, it always did! Only a corpse could be counted upon to give so little offence and so much satisfaction. He had been praised and praised by people who did not know what they were talking about, but who were often overcome by an emotion of admiration for their mere technical projection

of these false declarations. And he had responded just as gracefully with quiet, manly force.

Yes, his conduct this evening had had the perfection of an automaton. It had been like that for years and years. He was like a mechanical piano player, he decided, horribly flawless and quite dead. And what had that idiotic Prince woman meant when she said she would be with him every minute while he was away, and he had only to shut his eyes any instant to see her at his side? If anything like that were to occur, he would open them quickly enough!

The hall light was burning dimly as Adam opened the door. A silky lustre picked out the cumbrous antique furniture and the assorted bric-a-brac that was ranged there with the desolate, crowded meaninglessness of furniture in a warehouse. The entire manse, big as it was with its many rooms, was like this. Everything was heterogeneous and incongruous. There were many things that were excellent, and things that were quite worthless, suitable only for the junk shop. There was every kind of taste in Adam's house, for there was everything in it.

It was shortly after they had first come to Marathon that Antoinette had begun to amass things in a cold, deceptive obsession; this habit had grown very slowly like all strong passions. It was now an ineradicable one. As the children became older, it had even supplanted them as her dominant interest. Neither the usefulness of a thing, nor the beauty, mattered to her; only the value. And in her eyes everything had value. The cellar was even piled with hoarded newspapers and empty grocery cartons as well as broken chairs, worn-out mattresses and rusting ironwork. Antoinette's eyes glowed secretly at the appearance of any new acquisition, though this were no more than an empty jelly glass. Her arms seemed to slide enfoldingly around it like an octopus, and to attach themselves as stickily. She had an appearance of sitting on guard in her front hall. In the attic upstairs, next to Mrs. Blesscomb's room, were now stored even Cousin Daniel's innumerable cases of dusty seashells.

When Adam's mother had died more than ten years ago, Antoinette had wandered voluptuously through the rooms of the old Brooklyn house with a softly gloating expression. It was with difficulty for once that she mastered her voice and kept it at its usual calm pitch.

And all these things—the clocks and sofas, the beds, bookcases, and sideboys, the rugs, china and curtains, and all the decorations and gewgaws that clutter up the homes of Western man and are the half-breeds of his art—were stamped with Antoinette's peculiar gift for confusion, dirt, and disorder. For Mrs. Blesscomb, who had aged shockingly, was not able to take charge of anything, even herself, any more.

She was thrust away, like a guilty secret, into a room on the top floor. Around this she took an occasional, faltering step, and alternately whined and cackled in an insulting manner. Her mind was nearly gone, and she had suffered an astonishing alteration of soul. She would now and then hobble to the window, and call out to passers-by an invitation to come up and make love to her. In this monstrous suggestion there was something hysterically convulsing. Everything Mrs. Blesscomb could do to shock, startle, and disgust, she did with uncanny ingenuity and unconquerable persistence. It was strange to see instinct operating thus behind the empty brain. It was strange to see her will to live, her desire to be felt important by the only method now left her, expressed by these means, and at times nearly beating the intelligences that opposed her. But Antoinette, to do her justice, never complained. She looked after Mrs. Blesscomb with much faithfulness and care. She managed to seem unruffled even when her mother now and then quavered out an obscenity like a sailor's parrot, filling one with the wonder as to where she could possibly have picked it up.

At any rate, once lacking her direction, the house had rapidly been turned into a shambles. It suggested a tossing sea, fixed for an instant of rigidity by a high-speed camera.

In the violent disarray of everything, Antoinette's contrasting blandness, as she moved slowly and grandly through this turbulence of inanimate objects, made a grotesque impression. It suggested that either the house was only a dream, or else that Antoinette was a figure in a dream. But Adam no longer noticed. In fact, he was long used to it, like life.

And he was used to her also, so that even those traits, which he had first apprehended with shock and detestation, had grown so familiar through long association as to have become almost agreeable, actually soothing. It was knowing her through and through that was so comfortable, not having to wonder any longer about her motives, not having to trouble himself with exasperating doubts as to whether he was mistaken and was being unfair to her. Now he felt safe in the circle of her ignobility, as in the safety of some disagreeable habit or fact, so fixed, so absolute, so irremediable, that there is also a kind of security in it.

The births and rearing of the children had not affected things, except to increase the disorder. There were three others besides Ralph: Ernest, who was now twelve; Sally, ten; and Peter, nine.

This was the household in which Adam had lived for many years. He was looking forward to the long vacation on which he was embarking tomorrow. Antoinette had not even wanted to go along, and it was better so. Yet in a way he would probably miss her like any habit. Still, he had been counting on his trip for nearly three years now. It had been a long time since the one previous occasion he had been abroad, and then only briefly, barely more than a round-trip voyage. He was agreeably excited by the prospect.

Ralph had already gone to his room, and Antoinette was getting ready for bed. Adam declared he could not possibly sleep yet, he thought he would look over his identification papers and travellers' checks, and see whether anything had been mislaid. He said good-night, but Antoinette did not even answer. She was thinking of something else. Obviously

she did not mind his departure in the least. He was curiously annoyed by this fact which chiefly made things comfortable for him. He walked down the hall to the decent bareness of his own study, and shut himself in. He opened up the small bag in which he had packed his papers, several books of foreign-language phrases, and the standard guide-books. He saw his new passport lying there on top, and opening it, glanced idly again at the gawking photograph inside the cover. Did he really look like that—so old, so obscurely battered, so incongruous in appearance for anyone of his mellifluous pronouncements and sensitized private feelings? Probably it was so, it was doubtless an accurate likeness. He remembered how, almost five years before, he had stood on the principal street of Marathon, watching an American Legion Parade go by. He had noticed indifferently the paunches, the balding heads, and puffing gaits, and thought how oddly aged most of these celebrants were. Was the war that long ago? Were these the young men who had been in it—the young men considered then with such tenderness like so many puppies, the admired goals of so many pretty girls, the rash, valiant, innocent, helpless and altogether touching young men?

All at once it had come over him with a ludicrous shock that he himself was exactly like these paraders, partaking of the same general age, and doubtless of the same preposterous illusions. And suddenly he had felt for the glasses in his pocket, and slid his tongue around the disagreeable bridgework in his mouth, as if he never supposed these things had really existed before.

Now he dropped the passport back, and restlessly moved up and down, trying to send his thoughts elsewhere. What would he do first? Where would he go, and where linger? Would he change any of his set plans, and chase off on an unprepared exploration or impulse? How long ought he to stay in London? He must not rob himself of precious time and miss anything more important. He couldn't go to Spain, though, for there was a strange war going on in Spain.

He went over to his desk, and pulled open a drawer to see if he had left out anything he needed. But there were only some business letters in the drawer, some old income-tax duplicates, and such things as deeds and insurance certificates. As he fumbled absently among these, his fingers unearthed something that must have been stowed in there by mistake. It was an old photograph of himself taken nearly twenty years ago. Antoinette herself had taken it during their courtship; he remembered the very day, a mild, summer afternoon in the country, full of the sound of bees and water. He recalled her serious concern at the time that had filled him with absurd tenderness. Amazing that he had felt like that!

He held the picture from that time of happiness closer to the light, and gravely surveyed it. Had he once looked like that, too? A thoroughly callow young man, as absurd as his outmoded clothes. And yet he envied him. If only he could be that young man again, how differently he would order the course of his life! He would do something important this time! For nothing had ever really happened to him, nothing that was not external, and he had even taken care that that should be so.

After he had left Orion Mills nearly shattered, he had entered into the Marathon church like a monastery, protesting no more, not even against his own unbelief. He had made a dreary peace with himself. No wonder he affronted nobody. There was nothing dangerous about him.

And life had gone on in the rapidity of silence. His mother and Cousin Daniel had died and Uncle Ralph Image had died, with a kind of pathetic indignation when such an event was made apparent to him. The children had been born; he had refused several offers to leave Marathon for still bigger opportunities; there had been church disputes; there had been embarrassments, such as a lunatic in the congregation; there had been small, dull triumphs, a succession of new cars, vacations in new places, Christmas parties, battles to avert in the church, an operation on Ernest for

mastoid, and details, painful or agreeable, that make up the average life. Then suddenly it was all over, the chance was over, and while he was still preparing for the unknown, miraculous event, he perceived with a kind of shock that important adventure had passed him indifferently by forever.

He was—let the obituaries lie as they liked!—only a mediocre clergyman who had spent his entire mature life in one small town, had begotten four children, and never aroused the lightest breath of scandal. Soon he would die, with nothing done, nothing ever felt very much, leaving not even a memory after all his bright hopes.

And that was all the fault of that young man who had fixed his pointless course, and blasted those hopes.

Abruptly it occurred to Adam to wonder with what epithets that young man would, perhaps with more propriety, have assailed him had he been able to project himself into this lonely room after midnight right now and had beheld his humiliating future here. Would he not have been equally startled and outraged to see what Adam had done to him? He would very probably, after a moment of stupefaction, bury his face in his hands with incredulous dismay.

At the picture Adam began to smile to himself. His imagination, excited by the excess of coffee he had drunk, by the loneliness of the late hour, and perhaps also by his anticipation of his trip tomorrow, began to tease its way insinuatingly forward in the fantasy. He propped the picture up deliberately in a chair, and sitting down, stared hard at it. And, as he stared, it seemed to him that the young man, and not the picture, was really there facing him, and that his eyes had come alive, mobile with changing expressions, and now regarding him with a fascinated, yet desperately uncertain look. At the same time, he knew himself to be nearly as puzzled by this intruder out of the past—a young man whom he had practically forgotten and had long ago labelled and shelved away with some impatient shallow definition.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" Adam all at once muttered out loud, and then promptly grinned sheepishly and looked about apologetically as if someone somewhere might have overheard the folly of an utterance addressed to a photograph. But he was most certainly alone, and he took heart by affirming this to himself. He took heart, and dared to let himself hear what the picture answered.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

THE YOUNG MAN (*recoiling*): No!

ADAM: I beg your pardon?

THE YOUNG MAN: I refuse to believe that I shall ever look like that!

ADAM (*dryly*): I don't like to believe I looked like you either! . . . However, let's not quarrel. We may not understand each other, but after all, each of us is the other's closest relative. Why, I'm not so sure anyone else exists!

THE YOUNG MAN (*less indignantly*): Naturally, I realize a great deal must have happened to you to make me change like this. And naturally I want to hear all about it.

ADAM (*after a pause*): I'm afraid—frankly, I'm afraid that the account of my stewardship might distress you.

THE YOUNG MAN: But I want to know, I demand it! Maybe whatever *has* happened hasn't been entirely your fault. I will make allowances—I'm not unfair—but I insist on hearing everything.

ADAM: Well, what, for instance? There are so many things—

THE YOUNG MAN (*eagerly*): First of all, of course, tell me all about the girl I am so madly in love with.

ADAM (*puzzled*): The girl you're so madly in love with? I'm afraid I don't really recall—you see, it's been such a long time— (*He notices the wild resentment in The Young Man's expression, and abruptly comprehends. He gives a*

guilty laugh.) Oh! Oh, yes—Antoinette! She's very well—very well, indeed.

THE YOUNG MAN (*horror-struck*): Very well, indeed?

ADAM (*propitiatingly*): See here, I must tell you something: you're not so madly in love with her as you think.

THE YOUNG MAN (*with dignity*): Are you trying to explain to me what *I* feel? (*Scornfully*) Or simply telling me what you would feel if you were I?

ADAM (*with more respect*): Forgive me—perhaps I don't know—perhaps I *have* forgotten. . . . But anyway, the truth isn't as terrible as you suspect. Of course, it's many years since I lost your illusions about Antoinette. And she was far too practical and unimaginative ever to have had any illusions about you. But that part of it is all over and done with long ago, thank God! Besides, we get on very well together these days.

THE YOUNG MAN (*in a broken voice*): That is the most terrible thing you could have said. (*With angry accusation*) My illusions? My illusions, as you call them, are the truth! It's you who are deluded by your own heartlessness.

ADAM (*soothingly*): Now then, now then! That's all very gallant—and very silly, too! After all, I ought to know Antoinette better than you! Why, you're not even married to her yet!

THE YOUNG MAN (*He struggles with himself, then gulps desperately and falters*): Well—well, what did you find out about her that made you change? I'll listen. (*Abruptly*) But let me tell you in advance, I shan't believe a word of it!

ADAM: Suit yourself! Besides, nothing actually *happened*. I mean, nothing especially dramatic. It was just that I found *her* out. (*Compassionately*) I'm sure you'd be the first to understand, if you'd had my experience, old man. In fact, you did! Of course, it was quite a shock to you at the beginning. You fought against it like a tiger—refused to believe it, exactly the way you do now.

THE YOUNG MAN (*clenching his fists wrathfully*): Found out what?—what—*what*? Make yourself plainer!

ADAM: (*mildly*): Let's just say, found out I wasn't in love with her, and let it go at that.

THE YOUNG MAN: But *why*? Is your justification simply that you are shallow and fickle?

ADAM (*giving up*): Nonsense! It was because I discovered that Antoinette—*your* Antoinette—was non-existent. Anything that lives solely by instinct is surely non-existent in any serious sense! You can't define pure instinct, of course, in terms of character like selfish, cold, ruthless and so forth, even if it is all those things. Because, if it is all those things, it does not know it—it has no consciousness of itself. But what makes Antoinette's instinct so frightening are the sounds it's supplied with, and the wonderfully simulated attitudes of life. Why, they would fool experts, and often have! For they keep making human-sounding denials of everything she actually does, rather like a robot equipped with a phonographic device which repeats over and over how alive it is, and how dignified and important and noble are its tasks, and now and then at proper intervals emits the standard noises of approval or censure.

THE YOUNG MAN (*His expression is horrified*): I refuse to believe one word of this!

ADAM: Alas, my poor young friend, you will—for you did! And then, too, I fell in love for you genuinely later on as deeply as you could desire.

THE YOUNG MAN (*staring up with a cry*): What! With someone besides Antoinette? This is the most shocking thing you've said so far! You are not merely selfish—you are completely unscrupulous!

ADAM (*quietly*): If so, it's not in the way you mean. The harm I did was not to Antoinette—it was to Louise. And so, perhaps, to myself.

THE YOUNG MAN (*hoarsely*): You might as well tell me everything.

ADAM: It is not easy to tell—even now. I gave her up. I gave her up—after I wantonly made her promise to run away with me. I supposed at the time it was my duty to

do so, loving her though I did. I supposed that to have done otherwise would have been to defy God. So I did as you would wish me to—I did the honourable thing, the manly thing. And now, too late, I know. For I denied myself my one touching of perfection, my one glimpse of hope. How vain have been the lies that I have told myself in the miserable longing for consolation! Again and again I have tried to comfort myself that even the thing which happened was better than the inevitable familiarity, satiety, and the drabness of time; that only triumphant lovers can destroy love, and because ours was frustrated while it was still ascendant and brave and because it ended tragically, it could never end. But I know only that I have lost. (*His voice is a whisper*) And I know only that I destroyed her—for she killed herself.

THE YOUNG MAN (*with immense and quiet scorn*): And after all this, you seem surprised that your marriage has failed! Are you really as blind as all that? Did you expect it to be a success with this private treachery on your conscience? Do you think, because my poor Antoinette knew nothing of your guilt, that she would escape the effects of it?

ADAM: What makes you think Antoinette knew nothing of what you call my guilt? Have I failed completely to make you realize the efficiency of her instinct-mechanism? It is supplied with the most delicate apparatus conceivable for the apprehending of any hazards to itself. Antoinette knew all about everything at once, of course—even before I did. But she saw that it was not going to interrupt the smooth working of the machinery, and so was perfectly indifferent.

THE YOUNG MAN: I am not interested in your deplorable jeers. I understand only that your marriage has failed. Of course, if you had only had children——

ADAM (*interrupting*): But I *did* have children—four of them!

THE YOUNG MAN: What! Then why didn't you mention them before? (*Hopefully*) Perhaps you've justified your life by fulfilling it through them?

ADAM: I'm afraid that isn't true either. Of course I've enjoyed my children very much, and naturally have grown very fond of them. But the last thing I would ever wish to do would be to fulfill my life through them, as you call it.

THE YOUNG MAN (*spluttering*): But it was your duty—your responsibility—to shape them!

ADAM (*gently*): In due course you will discover that children are not mere moulds to be pressed into shapes that please one's prejudices, offering the temptation for meddling which is the chief form of our universal defeat. Indeed, children seem to present generally the false hope of atoning for one's own weaknesses and ignorance by attempting uselessly to exclude these same flaws from one's offspring. As this idea prevails everywhere, and at the same time is never rewarded with the least success, it is clear why the progress of man has been so agonizingly slow. I have had my hands full in the exhaustive endeavour of simply trying to bring *you* up, and am only too well acquainted with my own deplorable results to take on the monstrous conceit of setting up a repair shop for someone else's soul! All such concern about others, including one's children, is no more than a dodge to escape one's responsibilities to oneself.

THE YOUNG MAN (*with an insulting laugh*): Has it ever occurred to you that the theories which you suppose create your actions are only apologies that attempt to explain them away flatteringly afterward?

ADAM (*His geniality seeps back. Good-naturedly again*): I don't doubt that! My temperament issues directions which I am forced to obey unquestioningly. Naturally, like everyone else, I try to salve my injured sense of self-importance by pretending I have had something to do with the forming of these directions.

THE YOUNG MAN (*pouncing on him triumphantly*): In that case you should feel no compunction about your conduct towards this girl you've told me about.

ADAM: Oh, I feel the deepest misery. But I feel no moral

responsibility for the bitter circumstances that happened to coincide with my own weak character.

THE YOUNG MAN (*violently*): Then who *is* responsible? God?

ADAM (*equably*): I certainly know of no one else.

THE YOUNG MAN (*whitely, his hands shaking*): Didn't He give you the *chance* to be strong and wise?

ADAM: Not if He left those elements out of me, or the will to cultivate them. Even if I do anything of myself, that is always dependent upon the tools I have originally been given to work with. I know, for the sake of society, we must invent rules that pretend to fix responsibility upon the individual. But trust me, this is no more than a practical expedient.

THE YOUNG MAN (*helplessly*): I do not understand what has happened. It is as if you had now even abandoned God.

ADAM: If so, He certainly supplied me with the ability for that, too.

THE YOUNG MAN (*He recoils in horror*): You even admit it! Why, you are even viler than I supposed!

ADAM (*irritably breaking in*): What is the sense of hurling accusations at the inevitable? Don't forget, if I chose, I can send you away just as easily as I summoned you!

THE YOUNG MAN (*defiantly*): And still be at peace yourself, if you do? You are afraid of me! You are afraid that my faith is a truer answer than all your unhappy skepticism.

ADAM (*He thinks it over*): That could be, I suppose.

THE YOUNG MAN (*triumphantly*): The only way you can get rid of me now is to convince yourself you are right! (*Tauntingly*) But can you?

ADAM (*musingly*): Yes, I should certainly try. Even ignorance must have its compensations, and faith, I suppose, is one of them. Very well, then, Judge. Faith! I submit myself to the scrutiny of your court, reminding you that you, too, are on trial. And I take the stand as my own, my sole, witness.

THE YOUNG MAN: Then let me ask you a single question.

Why, when you so utterly ceased to believe, did you not abandon your false position as a clergyman?

ADAM: For precisely the reason that I didn't believe, and hence there was nothing to abandon.

THE YOUNG MAN (*with agitation*): But you secretly betrayed the people who trusted in your sincerity, didn't you? Do you feel no remorse at your hypocrisy toward them?

ADAM: On the contrary, I was exactly what they desired. Or rather, after some painful effort, I became so. It was not an overnight happening. I assure Your Honour! But in the end it was ironically my congregation that converted me—or, perhaps, unconverted me.

THE YOUNG MAN: Are you suggesting in another of your sneers that the members of your church were as godless as yourself?

ADAM: No, no! I am merely explaining that we acknowledged two quite different gods, and if I did not end by accepting theirs, at least I was persuaded into abjuring mine. Of course, as I have said, this process was a lengthy one. I could not help gradually noticing that the members of my flock never believed for an instant any of the things which they professed. Certainly they never even pretended any longer that their lives could actually be regulated by such tenets. They had lost the ecstasy of the idea and its simple hope; and looked away from its far too simple explanations of the unfathomable. The selfless fervour which had long ago created their forms of worship did not even linger now as a memory. Like all conservatives, they were the descendants of successful radicals, and would have been the first to repudiate their ragged and disgraceful ancestors. They would have shuddered at beholding these fanatic vagabonds huddled together in murky catacombs, and would certainly have endorsed their destruction by the best people, in the promptest possible gladiatorial entertainment available. In a word, the brilliance of rebellion was gone from Christianity, and tragically, nobody wanted it back. Against such familiar

perceptions, I opposed the conviction that the contempt of men does not derogate any superior thing they despise, but only themselves.

At any rate, it seemed to me I had been guided by sheer good luck to a comprehension of my actual mission: it was to be my task to convert these Christians to Christianity. I tried very hard, Your Honour! I arrived only at the dismal realization which sooner or later must overwhelm all reformers and all searchers: that the truth is acceptable only to those who know it already. The rest do not even bother to understand, since abstractions are not likely to interfere with their comfort. A thousand sages of various kinds have reviled the baseness of man, and have been read ever since with ineffable contentment. It is like receiving a letter of abuse from someone securely in prison. Then at last I was stunned by the incredible supposition that I had been born in the very era in which the religious sense had actually come to an end—for everyone, that is, except a few lingering fanatics. If so, how could such an astounding change have come about so abruptly?

In my perplexity I tried to examine that old war between science and religion which had been gathering such breathless momentum during the last few decades. Had science, so obviously winning adherents everywhere, finally demolished its ancient adversary? Had religion been wiped out with no trace, like a civilization by a glacier? Then one day it became suddenly apparent to me that it was the conqueror who had been conquered. Or rather he had only put on the robes of his vanquished foe, and sat, scepter in hand, served by innumerable sycophants. "The King is dead! Long live the King!" he cried, and added menacingly, "The King can do no wrong!" Your Honour, what my staggered eyes beheld was that science had become religion! By science, I mean all kinds of science, including, of course, the new science of social organization.

Surrounded by magic buttons, in temperatures selected by their desire, and swallowing chemicals to produce longevity,

men now dismally congratulated themselves upon the new powers allotted to them by their latest god, without ever asking themselves how it was that he had neglected by even so much as a particle, to add anything whatsoever to their happiness, or to detract anything whatsoever from their despair. Since the discarded religion had feebly put forward only the last two claims, and professed to think everything else of no moment, it was naturally seen at once that it was a subversive scoffer.

And the new claims to infallibility of the new god were accepted with touching trust in spite of the fact that nearly every arch-priest of science had founded his own reputation by completely refuting the theories of some previous arch-priest. Indeed, to dispute the actual value of any of these ingenuities had become the new blasphemy, while disbelief in the divinity of Man, himself, was now the new atheism.

But if I myself repudiated this advanced dogma, and the new saints who grasped their odorous test tubes like so many altar boys with incense braziers, I was at least forced to turn a sharper scrutiny upon what I still professed to believe. To preach it, against a multitude of heretics so vast, I must be surer of it still. It was then in my earnest examination of it, and in the attempt to strengthen myself in its exposition, that my conviction fell completely to pieces. . . . I trust Your Honour will not suppose I had returned to a callow indignation against the inconsistencies in Holy Writ which inflict all of us in our extreme youth, and through which Your Honour, if I remember rightly, also passed. These discrepancies were unimportant compared to the greater significance of inner good. No, what finally disturbed me was something far looser and more intangible.

It came over me at last, with passionate resentment but irresistible force, that the idea of love was an absurd directing principle for a species that was required to exist almost entirely by the idea of hate—for so I conceive the motive of human competition; a species impelled, indeed, simply by the grossest incentives and advantages, whose

few vaunted exceptions to this could lamentably be ascribed only to hysteria or paranoiac vanity.

This conviction, of course, did not exclude myself. On the contrary it perhaps sourced originally from my enlightened comprehension of myself. For it was about this time that I stumbled upon the disclosure, scarcely with surprise, that I was a scoundrel.

On the whole, I felt rather soothed by this information: one at least knew where one was. But the principal reason why I accepted this uncomplimentary revelation so placidly was because it led me promptly to the corollary discovery that everyone else was a scoundrel also! For how can one avoid understanding one's mysterious species if one understands one's mysterious self?

Indeed, as one thinks of the long interpretation of life by art, it is easy to perceive that the villains of literature are simply heroes whose actual motivations are examined and described, while the heroes are only characters whose pretensions and aims have tactfully been left unanalyzed. Why should the race possess a core of such ignobility? Once it seemed to me I had found a half-truth which was a half-answer. One Saturday afternoon, taking a solitary walk, and entering a small zoo that stood in a park in the outskirts of Marathon, I paused before a cageful of monkeys. Other human beings gaped and shouldered there with me outside the bars, and seemed to find in antics that burlesqued themselves an unaccountable flattery. But it struck me that the beasts I stared at, and whose ancient consanguinity with men I could not doubt, even more from the evidence of their actions than from the form of their bodies, differed from most other animals only in their possession of an intense curiosity. It was thus probably curiosity that had created civilization, but the inheritors of this highly useful gift had inherited all of the other monkey traits along with it. If so, what a pity that some nobler division of animal had not been supplied instead with this same far-reaching curiosity—the stoical, benevolent dog, say, or the peaceful antelope,

and so transmitted its purer qualities in place of those of our offensive ape-breed?

And true or not, how poor a thing it is to be born a man! To be equipped with the desire to think, and then ironically thwarted by the niggardly limitation of logic! For the ultimate, disheartening realization is that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Our little minds are formed to grasp only finite statements. We are made wretchedly uneasy, not by a mere handful of exceptions, but by a dim suspicion that a contradiction lies calmly hidden side by side in every concept. It would be a death blow to all our feverish activities to admit that our various principles contain also the exact opposite of what they assert. Since, then, there are no absolute truths about anything, but only two balanced and diametrically opposed truths, it is our individual necessity to call either side of the coin, and immediately declare that the other, being invisible, does not exist. Yet, all the time, black is also white, and God and the devil are as surely one. Every judge is quite as guilty as the criminal he tries, and both sides when deeply understood are simultaneously right.

It was such comprehensions as those, Your Honour, that led me at last to indifference and inaction. And my weak cry that goes up to heaven has at least the strength of honourable resentment: why should I have been given the ability to question if I have not been given the ability to answer? *(His voice dies away, and he sits reflecting upon what he has been saying, until with a start he looks up to see the Young Man's eyes fixed upon him. There is a long pause as they continue to face each other like this.)*

THE YOUNG MAN (*very quietly*): Is that all?

ADAM (*anxiously*): For the moment, yes. There is much more that I could add—things that have happened, tremendous trifles, which might help you to understand the influences that have shaped you. Yet I do not know if they would ease you. And believe me, I am sympathetic to your distress—I realize you cannot be expected to absorb in twenty

minutes what it has taken me twenty years to accustom myself to.

THE YOUNG MAN (*violently*): Please bring these falterings to an end! At least the devil does not cringe and whine! And you can hardly think to atone for the vile workings of your vile mind with a few conciliatory apologies. Oh, no! I have let you run along in order that you might hang yourself with your own rope. Nor do I need to speak: you have pronounced your own verdict.

ADAM (*impatiently*): Was I once really as intolerant as all this? . . . Have you heard nothing I have said? Kindly remember, in the midst of your contempt for my poor conclusions, that you happen to be speaking to your own unavoidable fate! I am only the result of the seeds of you in the soil of my times.

THE YOUNG MAN (*with heavy irony*): Has it occurred to you to ask yourself why you should be so nearly alone in your opinions? Does that never make you at all uneasy? Yours seems to me to be a case of all out of step but Jim!

ADAM: That does not offend me as you may have expected. Even you must be aware that Jim is often quite right—he *is* the only one in step. It has always been Jim who has been responsible for every poor, little advance that man has made.

THE YOUNG MAN (*He moves uncomfortably. His voice has a note of despair in its accusation*): But what has it all brought you? What profit is there in ideas that have produced only such sadness? I have never seen a more dejected futility in any human face.

ADAM: Would you think it preferable if you found me, after this long time, only a jolly fool?

THE YOUNG MAN: I have only one thing to say: we are not friends, for we have, thank God, nothing in common! And this I will add: had I known a man like you was to follow a man like me, I would have taken the irrevocable step that would have prevented it!

ADAM (*half shocked, half amused*): You don't really mean

you would have killed yourself? Do I strike you as badly as all that?

THE YOUNG MAN: I aspire at least. And see what you have done with my aspirations! See what you have made of the life I put so guilelessly into your hands! You have betrayed my love, cheated me of my most sacred longings, and despoiled me of my God. (*With rising anguish*) I would have defended you against the whole world, though you were reviled and friendless. Why did you have to discard all that was fine in me? Why did you have to tamper with me until there was nothing left? Why couldn't you have allowed me to continue as I am?

ADAM (*His voice is a whisper of incredulity*): Are you sincerely saying you would have preferred it if I had retained the essence of you—this foolish state of ignorant idealism you pretend is so admirable? Why—why, let me tell you in turn—that if all I had done was to make your idiotic dreams come true, I could not at this moment have borne going on living myself!

THE YOUNG MAN: I said nothing like that, and meant nothing like that. I, too, wish to change—only not like you!

ADAM (*after a pause*): Well, who knows? Perhaps you have merely to wait. I do not think that the portrait I have presented it set with some mystical artist's fixative. Why, even tomorrow, I am going abroad. What may not happen to me there? Who can tell what is ahead? And this I ask you to remember: I am not content with the portrait yet; it is not finished yet! Be patient! And, meeting this once, and this once only, remember that the powerful secret we share is that the fate ahead is not your fate alone, nor my fate, but both our fates. Will you forgive what you do not yet understand? Will you trust me, and hope?

(*The Young Man gazes down in diffidence. But a tremulous smile crosses his mouth. He looks up slowly, smiling still. Adam gives a cry of delight. He springs to his feet, and advances, as though about to stretch out his hand. But as he does so, the figure in front of him smoothly*

dissolves into its tones of grey, and returns to the sanctuary of the faded photograph, propped up on a chair back. Even this seems more dim now, for the lamp has a wasted glow in the steel-coloured daylight advancing through the windows.)

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

IT WAS ABOUT ten o'clock in the morning, and over the land, lying still and enervated even at this season of the year, the strong sunlight poured garishly. There was something toneless about this brassy yellow flood; it had a monotonous and uninteresting evenness like a wash applied by a commercial artist's airbrush: for this was southern California in the Spring.

In this light the exclusive subdivision, assiduously landscaped until it looked like a cake, with layers woven together by circuitous roads, could be seen to occupy a stretch of irregular, stubby hills. All the houses, set on the crests or in ravines, were complex to the point of eccentricity, and begged for the approval of the uncultivated with bizarre designs that could have had no other purpose.

One of them, in particular, sprawling and dangling all along a ridge, seemed to be fitted into the abrupt descents and sudden rises of its site with the compactness of a unit in a jigsaw puzzle. It commanded a lordly view that somehow managed at the same time to be dispiriting. About it were placed various gardens, terraces and game-courts, a formal transplanted grove of trees wired with coloured lights, a miniature waterfall and lily pond, and a blue-tiled swimming pool over one margin of which an extension of the house itself abutted like a brow above an eye-socket. All the appointments to be seen were costly, and everywhere statements of an exhausting luxury were declarative in such

things as brightly tinted outdoor furniture, various arbours and playhouses, and a grand, architectural open-air fireplace equipped idiotically with electric cooking arrangements, and even flanked by piped-in icewater. It was a place which seemed to reduce to sardonic emptiness the dreams of materialism by desperately fulfilling all of them.

Inside the house, in an upper bedroom, furnished with the same surfeiting and oppressive elegance, a girl was now sitting in profound stillness. She was quite cheaply dressed, yet with considerable effectiveness, wearing a clash of colours, that belonged to the land, like a tropical bird. She was not beautiful, though her eyes, stoical, observant, and unmalicious, were fine. Her face was rather freckled, the colour of her hair indefinite. She had bound it in braids around a well-shaped skull. But the unusual breadth of her shoulders and their level line was both odd and attractive, in combination with her youth. They lent her a certain sexual distinction.

She was gazing with deep fixity, as she had been for a long time, towards a man who lay asleep in the vast, ornamental bed nearby. She was gazing at the same man at whom Will Giles, many years before, had gazed in nearly the same way in his first Boston office.

He now emitted a groan which trailed off in a querulous whimpering sound, rolled laboriously over, waited for still another moment or two for life to seep slowly back into him, and then resentfully lurched up into a half-sitting position. His eyes groped morosely straight ahead for understanding. He was, as the saying is, still asleep. As yet, he had not assumed the complex human shell which was both armour and weapon, which projected him with significance, and also gave him any meaning outside of mere biological existence. It was as though he hung for a giddy instant between two worlds. Then he began smoothly to draw out of one and advance into the other, enveloping himself in his shell at the same pace.

This particular shell of his was fitted together from many

elements, and no one could aspire to set down all its equations any more than to resolve the mathematics of a tangled fishing line. But its hypothesis was a nature that had apparently decided from infancy to have its own way always, and furthermore never to pay anything for this. It was clearly accustomed to the instant gratifications of all impulses whatsoever, accompanied by a burst of rage at the least delay about the arrival of any of these. This was a man who had probably not the slightest idea of what discipline was, but only frustration.

And this shell, moreover, was made up from the most persistent and extravagant course of dissipations imaginable, nearly a lifetime of dissipation, day after day, in which no appetites of any sort had ever been resisted for an instant, and against which his hardy constitution had fought gallantly and magnificently all alone.

For the most part these had taken the form of sexual indulgence; he had been about as near a thing as possible to an actually professional lover. Being so, he had probably never been in love in his life. Yet he could not possibly have remembered half the women with whom he had had adventures, trifling or momentous—girls he had met on trains, embraced drunkenly in brothels, ravished from homes, seduced from husbands, picked up and dropped, lived with and deserted. These experiences had even included five erratic and tumultuous marriages.

The protagonists of these, also, he could scarcely recall with any distinctness, though their mark had been left, nevertheless, upon the shell. But once a thing was over, he promptly thought no more about it, and besides they were distorted out of perspective by pointless memories that had twisted through them, interrupted them, or ended them, and which had sometimes been far more vivid. He could hardly have said now what Ilsa Lenzi, the opera singer, looked like, whom he had married so long ago in Paris in the flush of his youth, principally because the spectacular qualities of the act had appealed to him at the time. Ruth Royce, the

celebrated picture star, who had followed almost four years later, was another marriage made in a show case, but was more easily remembered because ten million clicking camera shutters continued to repeat her image long afterward. Then there had been Barbara Drake, a girl of a rich, conservative family and admired social position, an episode that had lasted through nearly three stormy years—two children even being born; and directly after her, Josie Capp, who aspired to be a dancer, and who was completely stupid and completely illiterate, but completely beautiful, too; and following her in turn, after a very long interval this time, Geraldine Riley, who had discarded a number of previous husbands, herself, and was so violent and so studiously vulgar that marriage with her suggested a kind of jeer at the whole institution, at the whole world, and perhaps also at himself.

And these flying incidents, which burlesqued so stridently the ordinary forms of domesticity, were shot through with disgraceful brawls in cafés and at parties, with acrimonious lawsuits, with shameless demonstrations of passion in public, with unmotivated quarrels, with crazy flights and crazier reconciliations—all of them exhibited in a livid glare of newspaper sensationalism.

But most of the downright indecencies which were threaded through these sordid experiences were, for obvious reasons, less blatantly trumpeted, and restricted to the grinning gossip of his own world. He had certainly given a shameless record of himself, as if taking a kind of perverse pride in the most disreputable actions he could invent. When he had married Barbara Drake, for instance, he had carried her off on the first night of their honeymoon to a crib in the red-light district of a Mexican border-town which he had engaged specially, though she did not discover where she really was until the following morning. When he had rapidly grown bored with Josie Capp, with her limp body and beautiful, bovine face, he had taken her on a long trip to Tahiti and instantly abandoned her there, leaving her completely stranded. When Ruth Royce had returned un-

expectedly from picture work on location to find he had invited into her bed not one blonde extra-girl, but two at the same time, he had harangued her unabashed from the pillows between them with such ferocity for her contemptible act of spying upon him that she had actually burst into miserable tears of apology. And when, grown older and still harder now, he had finally run off with Geraldine Riley with both of their last two divorces still not unquestionably settled, he had insisted on taking along his mistress of the period, too, for the depraved, drunken jaunt.

He was now, at nearly fifty years old, so jaded that his exhausted disinterest in everything was like a kind of sickness. He had gone back and forth constantly to Hollywood during the years, so that it might be said that he had lived there as much as any place. For though at various times he had done many things, from advertisements to a few facile and worthless portraits (for which he had demanded outrageous prices), nowhere else had he ever been able to make so much money so easily, and in his lavishness upon himself (he was noted for niggardliness with everyone else) and the stupendous cost of his many marriages, he had long ago squandered the most part of the large, inherited estate that had come to him.

He had been useful, too, without much effort, to Hollywood, his name coming to stand in solitary impressiveness as the one indispensable art director for any production which aspired to pre-eminence. He frightened people who were secretly troubled with inferiority because of their meagre education, by the unshakable, scornful dogmatism of his taste, and without ever doing much more than contributing a loose, general, usually flashy idea, he caused poorly paid staffs of hard-working hack designers to turn out sets and costumes that were always a little larger than life, a little bolder and more startling, and so overcoming the reducing monotony of the shadowy photographs that repeated them.

Thus, in spite of his unreliability, his outrageous demands,

and astonishingly even his virulent anti-Semitism in a self-assertive Semitic community, he was always sought, however reluctantly.

All these things, then, had come to form the living externals of the ravaged-looking man in the bed, which he usually gave expression to in a kind of ironically pompous and over-elaborate speech, interspersed at the same time with the bluntest, most irascible filth and oaths; this was his carapace after many years.

And as bit by bit the segments now locked firmly together into a hard, glittering and baleful surface, Julian Gamble opened his eyes with the final wideness of restored consciousness, stared disagreeably all around, and sat up at last in his assembled shell.

His gaze struck quickly and with a kind of automatic hostility at the watchful girl. He had not the least recollection of ever having seen her before. Then his stare passed indifferently over her head, and suddenly took on a fixed frown of examination at the sight of a painting on the opposite wall. This was the delineation of a middle-western farm scene, the farmer bending to his plow over a land as convex as a billow, with trees in the distance curving against a sharp blue sky, all the colours hard, clear, and issuing as direct statements. It was a type of work that was deeply admired at the moment, but which Julian disliked intensely.

But it told him, at any rate, where he was—back in one of the gaudy, atrociously decorated houses which he invariably rented for appalling sums for his sojournings in Hollywood, and which his agent, Harley Scarborough, always procured for him in advance. Yes, he was back, and would be here for at least three months, perhaps longer—the thought filling him with a sensation not unlike nausea. He was broke again, most seriously broke this time; that was the only reason he was back at all. He had only managed to come out on a borrowed thousand dollars which Harley Scarborough had wired him. There were lawyers after him, too, on all sides. He had to get money, a great

deal of money, in order merely to be even. And that, at least, this place had to offer.

His irritated eyes now returned to the girl, slowly taking stock of her, and not altering their expression in the least in response to her timid smile.

"Who the hell are you?" he demanded.

"Hester Blue," she said, in a rather full voice, quite pleasantly deep in a young woman, and then added as if in apologetic explanation: "You asked me to stay last night."

"Oh, I did, did I?" he said in his familiar mimicking of suavity, in which there was every sound of contempt and attack. "Well, I don't remember anything about it!"

But as he said that, he suddenly did, and last evening's confused party came back to him in wisps and fragments, in great gulps of noise with the odours of perfume, tobacco, and whiskey, and the dull echoes of loud arguments and crude guffawings of laughter.

In the midst of it all, he had, of course, told this girl to stay, but some time thereafter had ignominiously passed out. No wonder he felt so seedy this morning, that his throat was so cracked and swollen, and his mind so full of erratic plungings. And the mood of pleasure which had preceded this pain had not carried on through, but had vanished without a trace of itself, as it always did, so that he lived as abruptly as a child in the immediate present, and was intractable and difficult to deal with for this more than any other reason.

He closed his eyes in violent repulsion as if hoping to shut out the physical discomfort which his wakefulness had introduced him to; and he told himself in an alarmed way that he must be careful, he must control his drinking more.

And as he decided this, the longing for a drink came on him so instantly and with such force that he immediately and defiantly pressed the bell, which he saw at the head of his bed, and when nothing happened directly, set his finger on it again, and kept it pressed there hard and angrily.

Exhausted even by this effort, he once more sent his scowling glance toward the unknown girl. Whatever intoxicated desire for her had seized him the evening before was now completely gone. Where had she slept, he wondered? She had probably found herself a bed somewhere about this damnable house. Or had she stayed all the time curled up in the big chair in which she was now sitting as demurely as if on a lap? Some little movie-struck girl, of course, accepting any offer in the hope of improving her fortunes; or perhaps just another of the innumerable Hollywood professional camp-followers, the usual filthy little gold-digger who now schemed to move in on him. An expression of cruel cunning passed over Julian's face. His voice became filled with its curiously pretentious, satiric ostentation.

"And now that you have condescended to honour my dismal hovel with your presence, my irresistible coryphée, you are no doubt eager to return to those lofty spheres of elegance which you yourself adorn—or, in other words, suppose you get the hell out of here!"

Her eyes fell, and looking disappointed without being resentful, she rose without a word and started quite docilely for the door. But as he watched her, Julian was struck by the odd breadth of her shoulders. They seemed to accent almost touchingly her otherwise complete frailty. He decided abruptly that she was perfectly innocuous, and besides, he dreaded the thought of being alone.

"One moment," he called out. "Before you tear yourself away so eagerly from this charcoal-burner's hut that I seem to be inhabiting, you might tell me why you stayed in the first place? I promise to be infinitely sympathetic, little one, and I promise also that you won't get a cent!"

She turned and appeared to be struggling with some elusive idea.

"I just wanted to watch you," she said hesitantly, but in a tone of perfect sincerity.

He laughed, being startled; and at this moment the Swedish butler with whom Harley Scarborough had also

stocked the place before Julian's arrival coughed, knockèd, and appeared in the doorway.

Julian, still keeping his eyes fixed on the girl, concluded in a murmur:

"On the whole, an understandable weakness. And in that case, what is your hurry? Your present precipitous flight—as if you found something singularly repulsive about me—is remarkably uncomplimentary. It is, besides, shockingly unsociable in so well-bred a young sprig. Sit down. Since you're fond of watching, I can offer you the ineluctable pleasure of watching me eat breakfast also."

As she tiptoed back uncertainly, he turned his red-streaked eyes on the butler, who rubbed his hands together and said good-morning with a broadly tender smile.

"Can you make a silver-fizz—a really good one, I mean!—as cold as hell—plenty of froth—and, yes, with a double shot of gin in it?"

The butler bowed, still smiling.

"Then make one."

Julian frowned again. He ought to eat something, too, he supposed. That was the trouble with his drinking of late: whenever he drank hard, he lost all appetite. It had been quite the contrary when he had been younger. What a trencherman he had been then! But nowadays, when the bottles twinkled past too rapidly, he could touch nothing in the way of food, and he grew constantly weaker even as the demand on his nerves called for wilder energies. Perhaps it was something as simple as that which had tumbled him into those deplorable, shattering depressions. Yes, he must try to eat by all means.

"Breakfast, too," he added, licking his mouth with a repugnant expression. "A lot of breakfast! But bring the gin first! Make it good, but make it quick!"

The butler left the room. Julian lit a cigarette, gazed disgustedly again at the painting on the opposite wall, and all at once burst into a succession of explosive gagging and retching sounds. His eyes bulged out, the blood poured like

fire into his head, and his hand that held the cigarette at arm's length now shook visibly. With a swift movement, Hester Blue took the cigarette from his fingers and put it out.

"What the Christ did you do that for?" he demanded wheezily as soon as he could get his breath. "It was only that goddamn picture which made me sick!" But he did not attempt for the moment to smoke again, and lay back in exhaustion, closing his eyes.

Suddenly the phone jangled loudly on the bedside table. With a curse, Julian took the receiver off, and set it down on the table without even lifting it to his ear. Indistinguishable squeaks issued from the diaphragm. He looked at it with distaste. "Go to hell, whoever you are," he shouted in the general direction of the mouthpiece, but the effort seemed to weaken him still more, and he dropped back with a groan on the pillows. For some moments the squeaking went on, split by intervals of silence. Julian, his eyes closed, laughed once in a weak, boozy way, and abruptly became still.

Hester Blue continued to look quietly toward him. Her face had a grave abstracted air that lent her simple features much dignity. There was no sound except for their breathing in the oppressive room.

Then the foreign butler came back, smiling still, with the same respectful geniality. He bore a tray with two foaming goblets on it.

"Put both of them here," Julian said sharply.

"And the morning post, sir."

Julian replaced the telephone receiver, clumped the letters together in his fingers, dropped them over the side of the bed into a wastebasket that was there, and reached for the first drink. The butler smiled more jovially than ever.

"I will bring you your breakfast in just a moment, sir."

Taking a long sip, Julian emitted a voluptuous sigh. How good it was! It slid like cream into the minute cracks in his throat. Its acidity had an enchanting tang. And the alcohol itself magically began to reach out to him like a welcoming

hand that he seemed to be rushing forward eagerly to meet. To anyone with a scrap of imagination alcohol was necessary, of course; only to the abysmally dull were the restrictions of reality endurable and life, unenlarged and uncoloured, good enough. And already, after another deep swallow, the spirits were pouring their soft, delicious message of confidence and almost of tenderness into his ravaged nerves. He was conscious of wave after wave of rising good nature. Yet a little anxiety was freighted by these also. He must be careful, it was early yet! There was plenty of time to get ecstatically drunk later; he must remind himself constantly all along the line to take it easy! He finished the glass, and picked up the second.

With devoted concentration he examined his own sensations. He forgot everything else, even the young woman sitting in patient stillness there. Presently the butler returned with another tray. Julian cast a distressed look at it.

"To hell with that! Take it away! No, leave it—I'll have some coffee. And bring me some brandy for it. . . . What are you waiting for, damn you?"

Hester Blue, getting up, began to arrange the things the butler had hastily put down. She poured out some coffee for him, then taking up a piece of toast for herself, began to eat it slowly. He surveyed her as if lost in wondering abhorrence at this function.

"Amazing!" he muttered. "How can you do it?"

The butler, not smiling now, returned with the brandy bottle, and at a sign from Julian, set it down and departed. Julian poured from it generously into the cup of black coffee and took a gulp. He shoved it where he could not see it, and lighted another cigarette cautiously.

"Better," he said solemnly after a pause, like a doctor announcing the progress of some important patient. "Much better!"

Sitting up more erectly, he now exclaimed. "I've had enough of it! Bring it to me—that picture over there." And when she did not immediately understand, he shouted

violently: "That picture on the wall!—bring it here! Are you deaf?"

But his gust of ill temper disappeared as swiftly as it had come, when she fumblingly lifted the painting from its hook and carried it towards him uncertainly.

"Open the window," he ordered.

She obeyed.

"Now throw it out!"

She slid it through. It could be heard falling somewhere below.

Julian took another drink. He smiled warmly.

"That was the trouble," he murmured happily, "the whole goddamn trouble!" He gave her an intimate, disarming smile, and reverted to his style of pompous mockery. "You, Miss Blue, as a connoisseur of art, no doubt suffered as keenly from the presence of that atrocity as I in my own humble way. A thousand pardons for not having attended to it at once! Forgive me!—an unfortunate short-sightedness prevented me from noticing it earlier. It is the kind of painting that you and I especially loathe. But then, as you have often told me, we have no painters in this country—we never have had one. Sargent and Whistler—our two standard reputations—and ju—st look at them! A flashy surface thoroughness which you can see through like a piece of cellophane, that was how I think you described the one, was it not? And the other, as cursed with the extraneous appeal of cleverness. That was very well put, Miss Blue—I am half inclined to agree with you—extreme as your judgments may seem to be. And as for the rest, the others who are as numerous as shad roe, you called them a bunch of goddamn fools—highly intemperate language, Miss Blue, though possibly not undeserved. Has anyone ever perpetrated worse junk? The same God-awful Vermont snow scenes, the same marines with spray on Maine rocks! Then the boys who paint factories and coal mines, and the ones who go in for slums and burlesque shows, and the ones who still knock off old hat portraits, or Gloucester fishing boats, to

say nothing of the crowd that goes in for the cock-eyed stuff—it's enough, as you somewhat inelegantly remarked, to make a saint puke. . . . Where's my coffee?"

He took a long swallow and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He was beginning to enjoy and admire himself, and looking over at her intent, puzzled face, he added abruptly:

"I like the way you listen. Why can't fools learn to sit quiet always? For that matter, why can't I learn to sit quiet myself?"

In the midst of all his offensively boastful sneers, in his appalling selfishness, destructiveness and merciless exuberance, there lingered still the remnants of his impalpable charm. It was strange, it was unaccountable, yet he had the power to disseminate a kind of warmth, as mysteriously as a lump of radium. It was not possible to say how this magnetic emanation came about. It could call up delight, gratitude, even homage, whenever it chose, without effort and without the least comprehensible claim to any of these things.

Hester Blue stared at him, as if by the act of physical vision she could be enabled to ascertain the invisible also. An unconscious, halftroubled smile hung about her parted lips.

Julian, gazing at her in return, was suddenly conscious of whatever it was, in spite of her unspectacular looks, that had attracted him during the previous evening. His eyes focused to take in the line of her superb shoulders.

"Come over here, baby!" he said in a voice that was at once casual and significantly deeper.

She instantly straightened herself, and in a muffled, defensive voice burst out:

"No!"

At the intensity in that small sound Julian looked at her with quick curiosity and with a new access of interest of a higher degree than the simple physical interest she had evoked.

His full, handsome voice rolled with contemptuous jocularity.

"Am I to conclude that I see before me unsullied innocence? A virgin in Hollywood? Good God, what originality! We must arrange to have you drawn through the streets on a triumphal float, attended by eunuchs pelting you with rosebuds. We will make it the sensational feature of the next big opening. We will—but one minute before I go further! I am not making a pitiful mistake by any chance? You are sure there have been no men in your life, no hideous contamination of your white purity?"

She did not seem to resent his heavy-handed satire, only saying impatiently as if to by-pass a discussion at once trivial and unpleasant:

"They didn't mean anything—not any of them."

Julian finished his coffee, and said "Ah!" with satisfaction in it. His smile grew still more ironic.

"And I do mean something? Is that it?"

She was silent for a moment, while he examined her with a kind of relish. Did she really suppose he was to be trapped by this kind of headlong flattery? Of course, it worked nine times out of ten. Even intelligent women soon discovered that preposterous declarations, which should not have fooled even a child, were invariably more successful than the most artful subtleties.

"And I do?" he repeated softly. "You haven't answered me yet."

She looked at him resentfully.

"Why do you think I'm so stupid?" she demanded. "I only heard you talking last night. You sounded so unhappy to me. And I wanted to find out why. I don't think anything else about you at all."

These words, delivered with a simplicity which was clearly guileless, jolted Julian Gamble out of all his bored preconceptions. He forgot for a moment the burlesque ostentation by which he proclaimed his own superiority and belittled everyone else. For the first time he really found her intensely

desirable, and he was aware with voluptuous, sadistic sensations of what a pleasure it would be to dominate her physically, to kiss away her poor little struggles for independence, and subdue her efforts to think for herself to animal emptiness. It appealed to him like a kind of rape that would overthrow not a mere physical resistance but the resistance of a brain which pleaded to be taken seriously for its own sake.

Affecting a conversational tone of the most disinterested sort, he now said with an inviting and disarming smile:

"You really mean that, don't you? Well, I shall be able to talk to someone at last! Come over here and sit down on my bed, so I shan't have to shout any more. Come on!"

But before she could respond in any way, there was the sound of a sharp, high voice outside, rapid footsteps, the door was unceremoniously pushed open, and Harley Scarborough, the agent, burst into the room.

Julian looked at him with an air of the gravest reproach.

"Miserable flesh-peddler!" he declaimed. "You have just interrupted one of the finest seduction scenes in history."

Harley Scarborough contented himself for answer with a mere scornful grunt. His round head sat as if neckless on his round body, like one sphere balanced upon a larger. In spite of his fat he exuded an extraordinary amount of vitality, but even this appeared to be superimposed as if it were an affected rather than an intrinsic characteristic. His face wore habitually an expression of the greatest crossness, and now and then was split open like a crater to emit a short, pained laugh. But his pretence of being cross at everything was only an attempt to hide the lack of being cross at anything; he was clearly universally likable.

His decisive eyes at once summed up the situation between Julian and his guest, and discarded it as completely unimportant.

"Look, I got lots to talk to you about," he declared irascibly.

"My dear Harley, where are your manners? Haven't you noticed there is a lady present? In fact, she is none other than Miss Red, White and Blue—Miss American Eagle—she swoops to conquer—she—incidentally, what do you know about eagles?"

"Drunk again!" said Scarborough with weary disgust.

Julian shook his head. "No, not yet. Your optimism runs away with you. But you must not be too hard on me—I am doing my best. Where the Christ is that coffee?"

"Cut it out!" said Scarborough impatiently. "I got an appointment for you at eleven o'clock, and we got to hurry. Harry Silverstein. He wants to talk to you first before I set the deal. And you damn well better get up, if you expect to go on eating regularly."

Julian gazed at him in sorrowful silence. Then he sighed. He glanced vaguely toward Hester Blue.

"Remind me to make love to you later," he murmured. "This cornborer here—however, you heard him."

"Get your clothes on!" said Scarborough.

Julian rubbed his chin. "I shall have to shave also. I shall have to make a neat and refined appearance. I am going to see my best girl—Miss Silverstein. I am going to dance in the moonlight with her and whisper sweet nothings in her ear, while I pick her loathsome pocket. But just how in hell do you expect me to do all this? I'm too weak even to shave!"

His artificially solemn eyes returned to Hester Blue. He pointed his finger at her.

"Shave me!" he ordered. "You. There is a bathroom over there—there must be things in it. Hurry up. Can't you see this animal here who barged in on our innocent confidences is waiting?"

She looked at him calmly, and got up to obey as if undisturbed by the oddity of the demand. Julian poured himself another mixture of almost cold coffee and brandy, and sipped it.

Scarborough consulted an address book, and then went to the telephone. He talked for a few moments with a low,

intense sound and the rapidity of a specious excitement. In a few seconds he rang off, and instantly dialled another number. Julian lay back, not even listening. Then Hester Blue returned with a bowl of water and the shaving things. She began to lather the sagging, battered, but still handsome face whose eyes ironically interrogated her from the pillow. Her own expression was detached and perfectly serious, as with a frown of concentration she began to scrape his cheeks clean with the safety razor.

Scarborough put down the phone, and Julian rambled on drowsily through his soapy lips: "Back again! Back in his hellhole again—this Jew paradise—this——"

"If you go on talking, I won't be able to help cutting you," said Hester Blue sedately.

But Scarborough burst out angrily:

"You better lay off that stuff, Julian! You can't take that attitude around here. That's one thing I've got to talk to you about. The industry's Jewish, so what? You take their money, don't you? Between you and me, you swipe it! And you need it now pretty bad, don't you? Well, listen, they're wise to you—you've shot your mouth off a couple of times in the wrong places. They're laying for you—all they're waiting for is a good opening—and you'll get yours! Let me tell you, it ain't the cinch to sell you it used to be. One of these days, baby, you're going to land right on your ear, and I won't buy your lead pencils either! What do you think Harry Silverstein wants to see you for? He wants to look you over, that's what, to find out if you intend to behave. A vice-president in charge of production ain't got any time just to fool around. And you better button your lip when you see him, that's all I got to say!"

Julian regarded him tenderly.

"My poor Harley," he murmured. "What a pimp you would have made!"

He closed his eyes peacefully.

"There," said Hester Blue presently, "that's the best I can do for you."

Julian groaned loudly. He lifted himself protestingly in bed, glared around him in a surly way, and then slid gingerly to the floor. He was naked. He padded into the bathroom and began to splash his face and hair with cold water there. As he dried himself, he examined his own sad eyes. How old and dreary he looked! The first exhilaration of the morning drinks was being transmuted already into something leaden like an armour that protected yet was insufferably burdensome. In a dull, formless way he reflected that the life which he had crowded with such hysterical affirmations of being had incredibly slipped through his fingers, leaving no trace behind of any sort. He was oppressed by the meaninglessness of those breathlessly hurrying years which succeeded the exultant expectations of youth. His face had that stamp of stale disappointment which becomes fixed on the faces of the mature after a life of any sort, which fills the stunned eyes of long-married couples in an ignorant resentment of each other for the defeat of their shallow hopes. Julian had no one to blame, and bitterness had made him a philosopher.

He looked about for his clothes, found them lying in a heap on the floor, pulled on a shirt with a graying neckband, and a crumpled pair of flannel slacks. There was something trampish and almost filthy about his appearance, like a final statement of indifference and contempt for all the opinions of the world. But somehow, even so, he could not extinguish his peculiar quality of distinction. Without being odd, he was instantly arresting, just as a clerk carefully got up in a neat pinstriped suit, a necktie maintained in place with a gold clip, and a folded handkerchief protruding jauntily from a breast pocket, might blend unnoticed into the obscurity of his own background.

Now he sauntered into the other room, and going over, drained the reeking coffee cup.

"All right," he said. "I'm ready. To the slaughterhouse!"

"You hired yourself a car yet?" Scarborough inquired sharply.

"Christ, no! I only got here yesterday, didn't I?"

Scarborough scowled and looked at his watch. "I came up in a cab myself this morning—my kids ran off with mine. We'll have to phone for another right away."

"I've got a car," said Hester Blue. "It's outside."

Julian patted her shoulder genially.

"You have everything," he said. "Soon you will even have me, God help you!"

A few minutes later a shaky Ford roadster from which most of the paint had disappeared was trembling down the drive of the big estate. Hester Blue sat at the wheel. She appeared to be reflecting. Squeezed in beside her, yet with an effect of lolling, were Harley Scarborough and Julian Gamble. Harley was talking vehemently, but Julian was not even listening any more. He held his mouth open slightly towards the rush of air, like someone who is ventilating a foul room. A profound and cynical indifference to whatever might occur reduced all circumstances for him to the same level of unimportance, and made him feel as irresponsible as a duffel-bag that was being carted about. He was not concerned in the least with where he was now going, or with what Scarborough was advising him, or even with his brief flair of interest in Hester Blue.

Julian and Harley Scarborough had not long to wait in the small outer office in which a number of other persons were already densely packed, in addition to the two secretaries there: a star just off a set, in evening clothes and full make-up; two or three scenario writers; a couple of rival agents; an imported French director with an uncharitable, supercilious expression; and still others of less easily definable types and businesses.

They were all talking trade-gossip in rather low voices and with a cynical, knowing air. Julian observed them dourly. The French director, whom he supposed he had met somewhere, nodded and artificially smiled, apparently in the belief that he was one of those whom it was important to know; and received in return a kind of dreary stare.

Julian's eyelids sagged, he looked, indeed, incredibly fatigued. Then the buzzer sounded, the receptionist told Scarborough they could go in now, the lock of the immense door in front of them immediately clicked like a toy machine-gun, the eyes of the rest leaped hungrily towards it. Scarborough whispered, "Now remember, button up your lip!" and he and Julian entered Harry Silverstein's private office.

Access to this was by a short flight of steps leading downward as if to a kind of huge, carpeted sunken bath. There was a cathedral dimness in the heavily furnished room with its diamond-shaped windows, an atmosphere of sombre awe that seemed to declare that this was a place intended for the formulation of only the most vast thoughts and the most overwhelming decisions. And at a glittering mahogany desk as large as a banqueting table, with an oversize cigar stuck in his mouth like an infant's thumb, sat Uncle Harry himself.

He was just now in the act of telephoning; and slewing around a quarter turn in his padded chair, he waved to his visitors an invitation to seat themselves. The stolid expressionless gaze was that of someone whose principal thoughts are elsewhere. His eyes, nevertheless, missed nothing.

For a man over sixty, Uncle Harry had retained his energy to a remarkable degree. He was obviously still having a splendid time, still finding the greatest gusto in battles and victories into which the poison of a sick wonder as to what they were all about had never entered.

He looked as if nothing but an explosion could ever carry him off, but as if that might happen at any moment. His face was flushed as if with all the blood of all the animals he had gorged upon, and his body, too, bursting in form-fitting, shinningly-new clothes had the swollen, glassy appearance of some champion specimen of prize stock.

He conveyed a feeling of the deepest happiness, which vibrated even in the spurious rage which he was now simulating in a long-distance call to New York. His loud

vituperations only announced how magnificent a thing was life, how enchanting he himself found it, and how enormously he admired his own part in it. He was in a way irresistible; everyone wished to contribute to such joy, and Uncle Harry was now so rich, he could spend whole hours with a fine cigar in one hand and a glass of the best whiskey in the other, just thinking gloriously about this. But his ambition kept him restlessly and pushingly alive—and Uncle Harry was now filled with a longing to be admired also for his taste, his culture, and his spiritual superiority, exactly in the way a multi-millionaire often attempts to prove these qualities by purchasing the most expensive masterpieces procurable, or by endowing the opera or the ballet in the illusion that about these things there is something highly intellectual.

But whatever was touching in this innocent ignorance was lost on Julian, who now slouched back, staring at him through the interstices of the fingers which he held in front of his eyes. Over the telephone Uncle Harry seemed to be conversing in a kind of ceaseless yell; he thumped the desk, emitted violent taunts of derision, burst into cries of outraged protest, and sneered and boasted in the same breath.

"Yah! You and Jake Botkin, too! It's the pushcart business you should be in! A couple hundred thousand dollar pikers! Now you just listen to me! What you run off yesterday in the projection-room—what you seen..."

Julian kept on contemptuously staring. In his obsession he saw only the obvious demerits of Uncle Harry, his plain greed, cunning, and atrocious vulgarity, but nothing of the robust warmth, the emotional honesty, that in some sense compensated for these things.

It was perfectly possible that Uncle Harry, roaring on with undiminished vigour, was quite aware in a shadowy way of his derogatory thoughts, that he accepted their existence with calmness rather than rancour, and that he dismissed the futility of ever attempting to answer them.

For to Uncle Harry, Julian's animosity towards his race

was not a fact which really mattered; the only fact which did was that he happened to require Julian's special talents right now.

Julian Gamble's name alone was practically a guarantee of what Uncle Harry was accustomed to call class. Uncle Harry admired this commodity not only because there was money in it. Any picture whose sets Julian designed was bound to convey an elusive yet wholly individual atmosphere. A good cameraman, or a director who was principally that, could get his teeth into such suggestive backgrounds, and escape from wearisome conventional shots without becoming wearisomely fantastic either. Audiences might be unconscious of these effects, but reacted to them nevertheless. So what, really, did it matter what Gamble thought, if he could achieve such results?

But how was it that he was even able to suggest this peculiar quality of class in his person, too, Uncle Harry wondered, as Julian sat there in a boneless lurch, with his unpressed stained clothes hanging all about him a though indifferently selected from the oddments of a rummage sale, while Uncle Harry himself, with a big diamond ring on his finger and in a brand-new suit from one of the most expensive tailors in Los Angeles, suggested exactly the opposite?

Yet if Uncle Harry lacked utterly all such distinction, pretended to scorn it, and was quite unable, also, to divine in what it consisted, he was keenly alive to it, nevertheless. Perhaps it was not from vanity alone, but out of his very crassness and illiteracy that he now so ardently aspired, with an almost passionate longing, to break away from the sterile commonplaces of motion pictures into a loftier aesthetic. Certainly of late, it had begun to be very clear what he was after, incongruously though this might often be projected through the most appalling breaches of good taste, the most ignorant limitations of vocabulary, and the most ludicrous distortions of his already vulgar accent.

In the last few moments he had become bored with his

telephone battle that tended to repeat its own arguments, and abruptly decided to conclude it at once.

"So what!" he shouted senselessly, cutting his adversary short. "You tell Jake Botkin, phooey! If he thinks he can give out every time a smash-hit sensation with them old beaten hams that was wished on me under contract, you tell him just go ahead and try! Until then don't give me no more back talk about the product!"

And without waiting for a rejoinder, he rang off, with the air of someone knocking down an opponent by a clump on the head, and swivelled about in his chair.

"Now look, Gamble!" he exclaimed without pausing for breath, and somehow combining in his voice both affability and belligerence. "I'll tell you in exactly ten feet what I want to explain. Of course you heard already what I got in preparation? Wait! Where is that last thing—the one that just come in this morning?"

He fumbled among the papers on his desk, and with a cry of satisfaction drew forth a trade journal that was already turned open to a full-page advertising display. He waved it in front of Julian and Harley Scarborough like a conjurer exhibiting a piece of apparatus with which he is about to perform a complicated trick. In large letters the announcement proclaimed:

HARRY SILVERSTEIN'S EASTER GIFT TO THE TRADE

Coming: Silverstein's Million-Dollar Babies
MAKE THAT CASH REGISTER SLAP-HAPPY;
Plus the Critics' Raves!!!

That's What You Can Expect with
SILVERSTEIN SUPERVISED SPECIALS

First Titles to be Announced Soon
Thanks and congratulations to all my well-wishers in
the Industry

Harry Silverstein
"THE BOX OFFICE'S BEST FRIEND"

"Now you can see, like it says here," Uncle Harry began expansively, as he slapped the magazine down again, "I am personally myself going to make some very big pictures. They got to make money, of course, same as it says, but, confidentially, this time they got to be different! They got to be beautiful, and I don't mean just technicolour. Natcherly I can't let nothing out about this, because it would scare all them monkeys to death. If you say something is big Art, positively they just grab their pants and run. You got to sneak it on them, before they know what they are getting. So I ask you to come here, to put over to you what I'm after, so you can absolutely deliver the same."

He relit his cigar and warmed to his task, sweating enthusiasm and excitement as his grammar fell more and more to pieces. It was like the cry of a poet, grotesquely deprived of the gift of even ordinary speech, and so striving to pass on his vision with inarticulate gasps of ecstasy, frenzied sounds, and anguished gestures. The chief purpose of these pictures, it was clear, was to show that he, Harry Silverstein, knew all there was to be known about artistic subtlety.

"Sophisticated they got to be!" cried Uncle Harry. "See what I mean?" But as he happily continued to the sound of warm mutters of approval from Harley Scarborough, he was conscious of a contradictory stillness on the part of his principal listener, a stillness that had in it some other quality than that of an appropriately rapt attention. Disagreeably, Uncle Harry was reminded of the silence that had ensued in a conference when he had first come to Hollywood and had suggested an idea which he had thought up entirely by himself: the story of a poor inventor (Gary Cooper type) who had been trying unsuccessfully to market the parachute he had been working on, and who occupied a small office for this purpose high up in a tall building. In an office, even higher still, the heroine, a beautiful secretary (Olivia de Havilland type) had struggled to escape the loathsome advances of her employer (C. Henry Gordon type) and in

the process had lamentably fallen through the open window. The inventor, staring out in despair, several floors below, had seen her come hurtling down. Quick as a flash he had handed out the completed model of his parachute. She . . . he . . .

But what did it matter now? Those who had laughed at him were still exactly where they had been then, while he had steadily climbed higher and higher beyond the reach of their jeers. He would show them even greater proofs of his superiority before he was through! They would be stunned to think how they had once underestimated him, and presumed to be amused by him.

Glancing over sharply now, however, the profound immobility of his listener was hideously explained to him by a tell-tale sound of regular, stertorous breathing.

"Hey!" shouted Uncle Harry incredulously. Indignantly, he swung around to Scarborough. "My God, he's gone to sleep! Absolutely, while I was talking to him! What did you want to bring around a feller in that condition for? Like he was a corpse or something! This ain't no Turkish bath!"

Almost as angry himself, Scarborough proceeded to shake Julian violently by the shoulders, so that his hand dropped away from his face, and he reared up, looking about him stupidly.

"I was just telling you," said Uncle Harry with withering sarcasm, "before I wore you all out, some unimportant facts about some foolish little pitchers I am going to make, which is costing me only a million bucks apiece!"

Julian belched loudly. Then his wits returned to him, full of surliness and insolence.

He suddenly did not in the least care what happened. He was seized only by the violent, irresistible whim to express his derision by a burlesque of slavishness, of elaborate, pretended humility.

His eyes, darting about, fell upon Harley Scarborough, too, with his anxious determination to ingratiate himself

with Harry Silverstein at any cost; and Julian felt a sardonic pleasure.

But Uncle Harry's eyes had likewise hardened with resentment. Since any occupation that tends to be centered in a single locality soon becomes a kind of club, whose members know all about one another's secrets with astonishing completeness, Uncle Harry knew that Julian just now happened to be broke. He was also perfectly aware that several other studios had put up with all they cared to take from anyone so difficult and would not even touch him any more. Hence, though Uncle Harry himself had determined to put Julian under contract, he knew Julian was at his mercy and decided it would be a good thing to throw a scare into him at the outset.

"Since you don't even give a damn," he growled savagely, biting off a fresh cigar, "I guess you ain't the man for a fine assignment like this. So let's call this whole deal off right now!"

Julian rose with a mock horrified look. He held out his arms as if beseeching mercy. Then, with bowed head and shoulders slumped in despair, he began to walk slowly toward the door.

Taken aback by this ridiculous behaviour, Uncle Harry gaped at him speechlessly. Julian had almost reached the door before Uncle Harry called him back.

"Hey! Where are you going? What is it?"

Julian turned. He lifted his eyes as if in the greatest meekness. His voice shook a little.

"But I thought you said—I thought you meant——"

Uncle Harry looked at him sternly. He was not even completely sure yet that Julian was attempting to make a fool of him. But now Julian advanced closer. Setting his hands on the desk and leaning over it, he said in an earnest whisper: "Don't! Don't change your mind! Do you know what happened to the last picture I was on? It was the worst flop in years! The actors said it was on account of the director, and the director said it was because of the story,

and the authors said it was due to the actors. But what really did it was my screwy sets. I never get any credit for anything! Why, they fired everyone on it except me! I wouldn't admit this to most people, but I happen to have taken a great liking to you, Mr. Silverstein. I feel it is only my duty to protect you from me, Mr. Silverstein. I'm poison. I'm——"

Scarborough broke in desperately.

"Look, Mr. Silverstein, he's only kidding——"

Uncle Harry was now really incensed. "This office ain't no place to kid!" he cried. He rolled his cigar rapidly between his lips. He had never been jarred by direct insults, however vituperative, but he was infuriated at being belittled this way. Too good-natured always to inspire the fear for which several rival producers were noted, he was nevertheless by this time accustomed to being treated with deference. And that this wise-guy—no better than a beggar when you came right down to it, in spite of all his big airs!—should first go to sleep while he was talking, and the moment afterward make fun of him to his face like this, was not to be endured. He was unable to comprehend anything so unpractical as Julian's arrogant perversity. He simply imagined that Julian thought himself indispensable, to dare to behave like this. In a rush of fury, Uncle Harry made up his mind directly to dispense with him actually. He would instead bring someone new out here from the East, someone who would be grateful for the chance, some young stage designer, perhaps. He would do this right now, and in front of Julian Gamble to show him! He wouldn't feel so smart then!

Instantly he clicked on the annunciator. "Get me my nephew, Alfred Zacharias, in New York!" he bellowed.

Then with a dark frown he relapsed into silence, and picking up a long night-wire on his desk, began to check over its items of information with a pencil. Harley Scarborough gazed at Julian disgustedly, and shook his head, as if to say: "You've done it this time all right, you damned fool!"

Julian looked back at him innocently. He had not the least regret. He deeply enjoyed himself. He, too, divined what Harry Silverstein now meant to do. He found a cigarette, took a few thoughtful puffs, and then quietly moved back to the desk as if to locate an ash tray there. At that moment one of the desk phones rang delicately. Coolly, Julian lifted the receiver before Uncle Harry could make a snatch for it.

"Is that you, Zack? This is Julian Gamble. . . . Yes, Julian Gamble. . . . Sure, I know it's a long time. More than twenty years since we got stuck on the bottom of the ocean together in the *K-13*. Well, I want you to do me a favour now. I mean, I want you to do your uncle a favour—I just found out he was your uncle. I want you to save him from me! Tell him the truth, Zack! Don't let him ruin himself! . . . And then maybe I'll call you up again in another twenty years!"

He handed the phone over to Uncle Harry. "He'll tell you," he said. "You just ask him."

Uncle Harry's face was stupefied. The news that the battered, dissipated man in front of him had been one of the young sailors on the submarine with Alfred that time bewildered him. He gazed at Julian from an entirely new viewpoint. His anger mysteriously evaporated. He felt that he had perhaps rescued Julian, too. He had all at once an illogical respect for him. And this sudden alteration of temper was not an exhibition of weak caprice, but rather of the strength of inconsistency in someone who does not waste a minute clinging tenaciously to a dead decision, and does not suppose that lack of instant adaptability to a new element and a new condition is force.

"Look, Alfred," he wheezed into the phone, "never mind about this call. Just skip it. This feller's crazy, I guess!"

He put the phone down and stared hard at Julian. But it was plain he had changed his mind completely, was now only trying to look stern, and had difficulty keeping himself from melting immediately.

"So you was inside that submarine with Alfred while I was there trying to get you out! And now here we are sitting together in this office!"

A misty conception of the romance of destiny stirred in Uncle Harry's blood. He shook his head in philosophic wonder.

"Yes, you're crazy all right," he repeated vaguely after a pause. He roused himself with an effort to his familiar vigour. "But who can do any business with a genius now? Get the hell out of here before you drive me crazy too, while I fix up things with Scarborough. And don't ever come back unless I lose my mind and send for you! I got enough troubles already!"

Julian regarded him in dim surprise. He had not expected this to happen, but he was so used to falling upon his feet in the most difficult situations that he did not experience any especial elation now. What did it matter whether he worked for Uncle Harry, or someone equally obnoxious?

"I suppose nothing can be done about it then," he murmured solemnly. "Please remember, however, that I warned you."

He gave a long, regretful sigh and turned away. This time Uncle Harry chuckled almost affectionately as he watched him move calmly towards the door and go out.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

JULIAN STROLLED DOWN the long hall from Harry Silverstein's office with no feelings of elation, scarcely even with self-satisfaction. He was rescued again from the uncertainty and terror that dogs the sleep of nine-tenths of the world; but this had happened before too often and too easily to surprise him now.

He experienced instead a profound sense of dullness, a feeling of helpless lassitude like someone waiting, waiting,

without knowing what this can possibly be for except death. He kept his eyes fixed in an unseeing stare, cutting anyone who passed that might be likely to know him, by the complete process of not perceiving whom it was he cut; and so, rather weak and sad, he emerged from the building into the street with no idea of where he was heading next.

Just then a small, shabby roadster sidled along the curb, reaching him and keeping pace with hem. Looking up, Julian saw Hester Blue at the wheel. He had said a facetiously elaborate good-bye to her when he had entered the studio with Harley Scarborough, and had instantly thought no more about her. Realizing now that she had waited so long, without making anything special of this, he was pleased. For her patience and interest did not seem to have any quality of pursuit in them, but to spring from something deeper, like a sense of their mutual loneliness and disillusionment.

He opened the door at once and climbed in beside her. "Take me to the sea," he said, "the damned old sea! I would like to think."

She imperceptibly nodded and swung the car around, watching her own driving and appearing intent solely upon that. She did not seem to expect him to speak, or expect him to listen to anything; there was something extraordinarily soothing about this acceptance of quietness. Julian did not bother to look at her any more, as if she were only part of the car that served him agreeably at the moment; and instead, he stared out at the crowds, now passing in the boisterous white sunlight, with misanthropic eyes.

Innumerable other cars were rushing by in a frantic quest of a thousand destinations, trying to make these important by pretending the most urgent need of arriving at them swiftly. Huge markets loomed up, occupying whole blocks, and comprising bakers, druggists, grocers, butchers, wine stores and flower vendours all under one roof, with vast stands of fruit and vegetables. Nearly everything was of monstrous size and glittering colour, but experience had

taught that this was a heaven of the ironists, in which the flowers were without scent and the fruit without savour.

The people, bred or embraced by this soil, were like that, too, Julian thought. He gazed out at the faces, reflecting upon the crudities he had come to know well from successive visits, and which had never for a moment struck him, at least, as comically touching or innocent; the decorated trucks which ambled along the boulevards at Christmas-time, containing Santa Clauses in cotton wool, and equipped with wind machines which whirled showers of confetti through the shining warmth; the jokes cut into the cement bases of filling stations that the passengers of cars might refresh their good humour while pausing for service; the evidences of innumerable cults and illiterate religions that flourished so rankly in the enervating air; the interiors of even the luxurious houses, with fences of iron grillework suddenly slicing rooms in two, or with quite expensive tapestries depicting sultans offering sweetmeats to houris; or with imitation hearths supplied with tongues of red paper that could be agitated by small electric fans: all the expressions of a traditionless population.

These derogatory impressions, skimming over the surface of his mind, afforded Julian no comfort, but only an increased sense of isolation in a contemptible, self-applauding world. His mouth felt dry; his head jumped and spun.

"To hell with the sea!" he exploded abruptly. "I want a drink!"

Miss Blue faintly inclined her head to indicate she had heard and would provide, while her direct, calm eyes continued to make no comment of emotion of any kind. Presently she drew up to the curb in a business section in front of a small café.

Julian descended stiffly, carrying in his gait, as always, something haughty and offensive, entered a drinking place that could certainly not have existed anywhere except in this community that he despised.

Its white, conventional exterior and large gaping windows

gave it precisely the look of a third-class lunchroom; and inside, the tile tables and cane chairs completed this impression. The bar was small and suggested a soda fountain; the bartender himself was listening with deep interest to some game or other that was being reported by a diminutive radio on a shelf above his head.

But the half dozen or more customers loafing about at such a telltale hour of the day in various degrees of alcoholic benevolence, pride and grief, were, for all their disparity, generic and universal, the members of a vast, inclusive race that is so linked together by a single inscrutable characteristic as to suggest the solidarity of a fanatic sect.

There was a huge fat man with pig's eyes set in a head that ballooned, too: he looked like the travesty of a eunuch; another man of mean appearance, but with a look of bemused intelligence, conversed with a woman, who was carefully dressed with a kind of formality, and had a blank, mummified face like someone forever on the borderland of sleep; and across the room, smiling to himself, and quite drunk, sat another man with a huge birthmark like a slice of purpling liver, and still farther along was a very pretty, very dirty young woman with the most sullen, belligerent aspect conceivable, glowering upon nothing, and ferociously determined not to be parted from herself. There were a couple of others, also, who did not seem to possess even physical individuality—persons as undistinguishable and unnoticeable in life as their gravestones would soon be in death.

Yet even these last shared the same motivation for besotting themselves at this time of day, shielding themselves from a realization which they had, by one means or another, dimly apprehended. They were all of that enormous complex army of variously labelled neurotics, whose neuroticism had perhaps sprung from a vision that was often inspired in turn by complex crippling and defeats, a vision of the intolerable dreariness of all orderly virtuous courses that have the horror of ultimate meaninglessness. For such as

these the little homes, the little families, the little footling, timid activities and acquisitions, the longings, alarms and self-satisfactions that make up the zealously accepted average life formed instead only a blank vista of hopelessness. This is a desperate vision that may be shared by those with brains and those without; this was the unspoken tie which had made them decide there was no other place to fly to than this, and no other way in which to declare their misery and their fury.

Julian sat down and ordered a drink in a voice that announced to these others that their better was here; then the moment it came and before he had touched it, ordered another. Miss Blue sipped a glass of beer slowly, and retained a silence that had something almost brilliant about it; and Julian, gulping down the spirits as if attempting in a frantic hurry to meet their effect halfway, stared all about him with disordered, enraged eyes.

Soon, with his unthinking ease, he had drawn into his orbit everyone in the room except the glowering young woman sitting in schizophrenic remoteness in the corner. His words, in a kind of pompous snarl, came without effort, and he insulted everyone either by his insolent manner or by his affectations of a cordiality that, pushed deliberately too far, reported exactly the opposite feeling.

Yet they were all grinning, all interested and quickened; even the wary bartender to whom such exhibitions were possibly familiar. For by his grandiose tones and expansive gestures Julian was making those claims to magnificence that so appeal to a drinker's mind, those claims of an excessive genius, or of profound philosophy, or of mysterious, nearly occult powers of perception, that have in them something as romantic as a fairy-tale, and burn only with the flame of alcohol.

It was strange, too, that his insults did not provoke the instant resentment which leads to a fist fight. Possibly his own unshakable confidence took all theirs away, or, more likely still, his own exasperation, as he drank more and

more, disarmed them by so clearly including himself in its attacks.

At any rate, there they now sat, like so many disciples, pleading with pleased expectancy for him to continue to thrash himself into a kind of cold hysteria, and so entertain and reassure them that it was actually exciting to be alive.

The great fat man now and then spoke in an appropriately tenor voice in a disdainful, but unheard way. The man of mean appearance, full of a show of much courtesy, had introduced his mummified companion as a baroness; she did indeed speak in an Austrian accent, and this seemed to delight Julian very much. He at once began to address the most extravagant compliments to her, and to pretend a burlesque humility. The man with the birthmark bought a round of drinks for all of them, and then offered to sing.

"Do you want me to vomit?" cried Julian. "Now, before you interrupted me, what was I saying?"

He looked all about him, meeting their interested, speculating eyes with a befuddled glitter in his own, until his attention came slowly back to rest on Miss Blue. He was now carried along without effort and without conscious volition like a sleep-walker, and the astonishing thing was the wild fluency that this undirected self possessed. He did not know or even hear what he was saying, yet was filled with the agreeable sensation of a surpassing brilliance.

He was determined to impress these casuals still more by his illimitable superiority, and at once, with a complete faithlessness, turned to Miss Blue as a butt. Behind this lay a longing to escape from pain in the only way that this is ever possible: by passing it on to someone else. If he could make her acutely miserable, this mild, inarticulate little stray who had attached herself to him as if for no other reason than mere mutual loneliness and uncertainty, he himself would find relief.

He slung another drink down, wiped his mouth as if there were something athletic and powerful about this gesture, and loudly cleared his throat, continuing all the

time to keep his luminous eyes fixed upon her with a glint of cunning.

"Gentlemen," he said in an indescribably ominous murmur, while he still stared thus, "and you, my revered baroness, and you in the corner there, Miss Sour-Sulks, I am about to declare to you, as my lifelong friends, the most solemn announcement it is possible for a man to make. Today I have at last found love!"

In the satiric gravity of his tone the subnote of savage intention was perfectly audible. The Austrian woman simpered and looked down at her dry, pale hands; her companion shook his head and waited expectantly; the drunken man with the birthmark exclaimed with a stupid guffaw:

"You're a wonder, that's what you are! Never saw anyone to beat you, no sir!"

"I thank you for your little tribute," said Julian grandiloquently, turning a jaundiced, streaked eye on him, "in spite of the inelegance with which you phrased it. In fact, if I may say so, you talk like a lousy, goddamn bum! Also, you have made me forget what I was going to observe next. Also, is there a drink in the house? Will not one of you kind gentlemen buy a small alcohol for this poor old blind beggar!... Ah, that's better! My thanks and my respects! Love, it seems, makes a man thirsty. Love..."

His voice trailed off; he was shaken throughout his body by a short, unpleasant laugh like a shudder. Hester Blue sat very still, watching him, as though tense with anxiety. He blew a kiss to her.

"Behold her!" he cried. "There she sits, the woman who, alone of all women I have ever met, has mattered a damn to me. Are you so mentally obtuse as to ask why? Well, I forgive you—I myself ask why also. Ah, but then, perhaps, it is because she combines in herself the excellences of all women—she is, in a word, woman personified!"

He blew her another burlesque kiss. As the others laughed, she, too, smiled a little confusedly, and began to look more

and more uneasy. Spurred on by these effects, driven ahead by a frantic senselessness, full of ape-like vanity and the desire to injure someone and everyone, Julian peered at his victim with his merciless eyes, seeking to attack her without any arranged plan or idea. It was as though he had surrendered himself like an insensate instrument to the will of his crazily-striking malevolence, and had no more authority over this than a quick-action field gun over its own aim and firing.

But he was suddenly, almost uncontrollably, tickled by the suggestion which he had accidentally produced, that he had indeed discovered a woman who was the complete composite of all known femininity and all known femaleness. With her rather plain face set above those subtle, level shoulders, her obscure and humble air, Hester Blue served with ironic aptitude as a peg for just such a fancy.

He was overwhelmed by a feeling that he was now grappling magnificently with the most profound truths, even while he was aware at the same time that this exultant, congratulatory sensation sprang simply from the whiskey bottle.

He was certain he had stumbled upon an enormous, undetected fact: by God, it was so!—there was only one woman—they formed a species without variation. Why, they were all alike, all of them, this vacant, middle-aged Austrian here, and the lunatic girl in the corner, and Miss Blue, and all his various celebrated wives, and the twelve-year-old children who comprised the personnel of a very special, exclusive, connoisseurs' brothel in Algiers which he had visited during one dimly remembered debauch: all of them: every damn one of them, the same, the same, by God!

Why, their only actual differences were plain, physical differences of size, contour, and pigmentation, which made men think they were getting something different each time.

So for one of them a man gave up all the Orinocos he had planned to explore as a boy, and knew finally that these would not now be explored, by him at any rate! And

sometimes in the eyes of mature women you saw a sort of wondering pity for their victims, and a faint shame for all the foolish high hopes they had so competently bested, while offering in return nothing but care and dullness.

As a matter of fact, Julian thought, women weren't much concerned about anything because they didn't believe in anything. They didn't mind this either. Futility? Hell, they took that for granted, facing emptiness calmly. Of course, they spent their entire lifetimes saying the opposite. -

Why, they never stopped proclaiming a lot of damned nonsense, when they would rather have cut their own throats than have acted on it for an instant! They never stopped uttering indignant outcries against the same cool, realistic behaviour by which they lived. God, patriotism, art, honour, virtue, truth? Hell, all they believed in was sex, and they didn't know what this was about either!

These thoughts passed through his befuddled and over-stimulated brain, full of the flashing feelings of grandeur, contempt, patronage, and sensuality. They charged him in no orderly progression, but in a kind of compact mass, as if in the character of pure sensation. And in the process of his groping digressions, he had almost forgotten his first intention to torment Miss Blue..

Now taking advantage of the ignorance of his audience, he at once, with great fluency, began to overwhelm them with a show of erudition.

"Look at her!" he cried again, gesturing in the direction of Miss Blue. "Don't you see at once how she has everything? No wonder she arouses in me all the profound instincts of animal courtship! I give you my word, I have an irresistible inclination right now to array myself in bright colours, indulge in ceremonial mating-dances, utter provocative sounds, discharge scents and perfumes, and present some succulent article of prey! I am, however, troubled. You, of course, know that women in primitive times were looked upon as slaves, then in medieval times as necessary evils, and finally in our times, as equals. Natural logic tells me

that matters do not intend to stop there. Oh no! In due course it will be me, or at least my male descendants, who will in turn be regarded by Miss Blue's female descendants first as inferiors, next as necessary evils and finally as contemptible slaves.

"I do not go so far to say, gentlemen, that Miss Blue will eventually eat us, in emulation of the female scorpion who makes her bridal feast out of her bridegroom. But I doubt that only because I expect that before that happens humanity will have dispensed with animal food altogether and be fed solely by various rays.

"What is certainly more likely is that in future women will grow bored with their present cumbersome arrangements for continuing society, and adopt the practice of eutelegensis. You are familiar with the term, are you not, gentlemen—the artificial semination of females by the most healthy males, especially selected for this purpose? I consider it likely that women in that distant age, as soon as they can get rid of their vanity, will give up the clumsy expedient of sex appeal, which at present prompts me in my desire to indulge in all sorts of courting antics. At that time most of the males, certainly the overwhelming mass of us, will be reared for some useful employment such as nursemaids, say, and the general care of the young. For the majority castration will doubtless be substituted at birth for circumcision, and our docility can then be counted upon. So as I sit here drumming on a log, in the hope of arousing Miss Blue's passions, I am dismally aware that I am already practically an anachronism. Gentlemen, would you consider it unmanly of me under these circumstances if I were to beg for another small drink?"

With his fine eyes full of maniacal scorn, Julian had rapped out his words with a careless, headlong energy that did indeed leave the others gaping. Now they began to laugh uneasily, though it was rather at the satiric ponderousness of his delivery than at anything they had understood. And feeling half exhausted by the efforts with which he had

thrashed himself into a pitch, Julian's restless glance fell almost accidentally upon Hester Blue.

He then experienced a voluptuous pleasure at the sight of the distress in her eyes, and of the uncontrolled workings of her mouth. He had unwittingly wounded her after all! She put out her hand as if in an entreaty, and demanded in a low voice, exactly as if they were all alone there:

"Why? Why?"

His momentary relief at the idea of having so unexpectedly shattered her was instantly gone in a suspicion of the real meaning of her tone, which penetrated to him even in his present disordered state.

She was asking him why he was tormenting himself; that was it—she was distressed only on his account! An obscure feeling of repudiation and unhappiness surged through Julian. He felt as lost as a theorist whose most precious theories have been unexpectedly knocked out from under him. In his unhappy mind there stirred an irrelevant, dim memory of someone in his childhood who had petted him and dealt with him tenderly, some nurse or other, of whose face and name he had not even any recollection. He abruptly felt sick of himself and his easy, sharp worldliness; unbearably lonely, almost frightened.

"What in hell are you hanging around me for?" he burst out. "What do you expect to get out of me?"

"Nothing," she said. She frowned, trying to find words, perhaps, for her own wonder, and after a pause added hesitantly: "Maybe it's because you're a great artist."

The innocent sincerity of this estimate reacted upon Julian with extraordinary violence. He was suddenly and unaccountably humiliated. Across his mind there floated a shadowy impression of what it might be like to be a great artist. The outlines were indefinite, yet they enclosed something noble and formidable.

"A great artist!" he cried with furious disgust. "Do you think if I were any good at all I'd be out here in Hollywood?"

She looked at him humbly. "But I guess you could be one if you wanted to," she said. "Though, of course, I suppose you'd need a little practice."

"Practice!" he echoed wildly. And the idiotic suggestion conjured up still another vision, this time of shack-like studios in a dozen art colonies scattered about the country, inhabited by repellent sub-artty people: weak, timid men, married to dowdy women in block-print dresses, all very much fascinated by themselves and their little oddities, and forever painting, painting, painting!

"Practice?" he cried. "Don't talk like a goddamn fool! A man's work is exactly as good as he is, not one bit better and not one bit worse. Do you think he can make it any better than he is by what you call 'practising'?"

She remained silent, looking at him in such a way as to give him the feeling that he had answered himself. A sudden loathing of this place, a sensation of sick staleness at having wasted his energies for the entertainment of fools, rose in Julian. He staggered up.

"Get me out of this dive!" he exclaimed angrily. "You got me into it. And now you can drive me home!"

He threw some money on the table and started for the door, not looking at any of them, nor caring in the least what effect this abrupt change of mood had had.

Outside, he hauled himself into Hester Blue's old roadster clumsily, and passed his hand over his eyes as if trying to stop thinking. He faintly groaned.

"Don't you think you'd better get something to eat?" Miss Blue said mildly, as she climbed in beside him. "It would make you feel better."

He cast a saturnine glance at her. "You'd be a fool to cure me. Because then I'll probably find someone else!"

She did not seem worried about that possibility as she began to drive. He closed his eyes and let himself be jounced along, feeling sick and battered. He lurched up presently and stared at her.

"One good thing about you," he exclaimed. "You can keep your mouth shut."

As if proving this, she remained silent. He shut his eyes again, and did not open them until the car stopped in a parking lot back of one of the popular restaurants patronized by picture workers.

"O.K.," he said wearily, "have it your own way! O.K.!"

He got out and followed her into the place, carrying himself with his strange mixture of physical weakness and belligerence. They found a table fitted into a semicircular niche in the wall, with a padded seat.

The afternoon had surprisingly gone. Julian had not realized how time had aimlessly and rapidly drifted by in the little bar. It was almost as if he had slept, and had now suddenly awakened in this place long hours afterward.

But the rather sumptuous restaurant had not many patrons in it at this hour, since it catered principally to a luncheon trade. Then it was crowded and glittering, full of startlingly pretty girls exposing their wares as if in a bazaar, with the feverish pretenses of gaiety and enthusiasm and carefree cordiality flung up everywhere from a seething cone of anxieties, ambitions, and the greedy quest for money. Now only a few people were scattered here and there at intervals at the large tables that squatted in the semicircular booths. There was the dim quietness of a club in the air.

A waiter presented a menu.

"Bring me three Martini cocktails," said Julian exhaustedly.

"And something to eat!" Hester Blue pleaded. "A nice thick steak—wouldn't you like a nice thick steak?"

He considered mournfully with himself, licking his lips as if in sick inquiry.

"Bring me a steak tartarre," he said finally. "I can try, I suppose. With a raw egg in it, and peppers, and plenty of hot stuff. Fire! I can't taste anything but fire any more."

Miss Blue ordered an omelet and a pot of tea. Julian gazed at her in mock wonder.

"How can you do it?" he muttered. "Sheer gluttony." He dropped his head in his hands, ending as if to himself: "I wonder if this time I'll survive."

Soon the waiter came with the Martinis. Julian drank them off in succession in a gulp apiece. Slowly he began to smile. "It seems that I am going to live," he announced. "What strength! I'm surprised that you're not somewhat frightened of me. And in fact, as soon as I have put away this tasty dish——"

But when he had added tabasco and Worcestershire to his plate of raw chopped meat, and muddled it all together with his fork, he could swallow only a mouthful. "If this were distilled, maybe I could drink it," he said disgustedly, shoving his plate away.

Just then someone who had spotted him across the room loomed up at the table. It was Ludovic Trapp, the director, an old crony.

"Hello, you bastard," said Julian without emotion.

"When did you get back?" Trapp asked.

"Back? Am I back? I didn't even know I *was* back."

Trapp dropped down uninvited on the padded seat. Julian did not bother to introduce Miss Blue.

"What the hell is that you're eating?" Trapp demanded.

"I'm not eating it. I ordered it to put on the black eye I expect to give you as soon as I'm well again. Meanwhile, you can order me a drink."

Trapp paid no attention to this.

"Are you going to Corley Fane's this evening?" he said abruptly. "He's leaving town tomorrow, so he's throwing a big party."

"Certainly I'm going," said Julian promptly. "But who the Christ is Corley Fane?"

"Oh, you know—the composer. He's all right."

"Oh, that one," said Julian. "Now I remember! I think he married one of my wives or something—I've forgotten. Sure, I'll go—we'll all go. But first a little refreshment. Hey, waiter!"

Trapp now looked critically toward Hester Blue.

"Where did you collect her?" he asked.

"I didn't. She collected me. Took me off the streets and a life of shame. It seems she admires my art. She wants to save me from myself, and especially from filthy low company such as you. It's one hell of an assignment, I'll say!"

They went on talking. Julian drank more and more. His feeling of exhaustion began to recede again like a powerful tide that sardonically promised to return with equal power. As his head spun, and the lights dizzily flickered before his gaze, a remote, sad warning filtered through him to stop now, to stop at once, before it was too late. But he suddenly felt crazily defiant of the wretched state of being he was now so zealously storing up for himself, as if indeed it were the sensations of someone else that he so considered. He seized the glass in front of him without knowing what it contained and poured down its contents as if exulting in his own impending disaster.

He inquired where Corley Fane lived, and then said he was ready to go at once. But Ludovic Trapp pointed out that it was still early, and mentioned that a number of studio writers were meeting tonight in another restaurant just across the street, to discuss a prospective organization they were planning.

"Let's drop over and see what the sons-of-bitches are up to," he suggested, and Julian assented indifferently, as he would indeed have now assented to anything.

"You stay right here, baby," he said easily to Hester Blue, patting her shoulder, "and I'll come back and pick you up afterwards. How about it?"

But he had no intention of doing anything of the kind, for in his new exhilaration he was once again tired of her, and felt the muteness he had previously found comforting to be a drag on his revived spirits. He would just simply not return, and that was the end of her! A damn dull girl.

He crossed the street with Ludovic Trapp. They learned that the meeting they wished to attend was taking place

right now in the private banquet hall on the second floor.

Julian and Trapp blundered into a room already full of people, and found a couple of cane chairs among others near the door. At a long table, littered with the remains of some standard meal which they had just finished, about forty or fifty men of different ages and greatly different appearances were still seated.

Julian stared at them through the whorls of cigarette smoke in the air, trying to make out just what was happening. He knew a number of those present—Jacob Eagle, for instance, and half a dozen others—but did not much like any of them. They comprised a number of diverse types: playwrights, novelists, former newspapermen, and article and short-story writers. There was even a doggerel poet there.

Just then Eagle burst into speech. He cavorted like an ape, made a fool of himself, yet with much pantomimic skill, even grace, for he had long since changed the personality with which he had first won recognition. You could see at once he was one of those who declare themselves to be lovable zanies, so that behind the mechanical projection of whimsicality, naïveté, and erratic vagaries of all sorts, they may give free play to the most formidable shrewdness and the soundest materialistic aims.

Julian observed him with contempt, not even listening to what he was saying. It was apparently something heretical, for a torrent of abusive objections, interspersed with weak giggles and hysterical witticisms, instantly broke out. Julian frowned. What were they up to anyway? What sort of organization were they trying to form? It was certainly no ordinary club. It then burst upon him with complete surprise that he was present at the actual birth of a trade union.

He grunted and reared back in his chair like an indignant old gentleman.

"The bastards!" he muttered to himself. His inflamed eyes burned with such fierce scorn as to be unconsciously comic.

"Let's get out of here!" he mumbled in a low, angry

voice to Ludovic Trapp. "I'll be goddamned if I'll listen to any more of this!"

But Trapp waved his request off impatiently.

"Wait, I want to hear more. You go on ahead if you like. I'll see you later at Fane's."

Julian got up, knocking his chair down with a crash. He kicked it out of his way and lurched down the stairway feeling immeasurably solitary.

Where was that girl? He would find her again, after all. She, at least, didn't get on his nerves. But when he entered the restaurant there was no sign of Hester Blue at the table where he had left her. He peered around him wrathfully. He felt enraged at this desertion. While he was still standing there, with a glare of indignation in his eyes, Miss Blue appeared suddenly from the opposite direction, and so had the opportunity to observe him before he noticed her. At the sight of the resentful expression stamped so visibly on his face, she uttered a curious low laugh.

"Shut up, you bitch!" he growled. "I can do without you, too."

She did not seem in any way offended. They walked together to the little car in the parking lot.

"Well?" she said before getting in.

"Oh, this fellow Fane's," he answered. "We'll see what it's like. Besides, where else is there to go?" With an effort he recalled and repeated the address Ludovic Trapp had given him. "Out that way," he added vaguely. "You know."

He slumped down into the worn seat cushion beside her, engulfed once more in the brooding, disconnected reflections which her presence seemed to arouse in him. As the little car sped along, he thought of the meeting that had so promptly destroyed his surge of good humour. What had he to do with them, after all? Why should they have infuriated him? Was that not because he knew he was so much better? For he was certain of his ability after all these years, while having given no proofs of it at all, unless his perverse

and wanton destruction of himself was that. In a far-off way he recalled what he had said to Hester Blue only this afternoon, that an artist's work was as good as the artist. For in the end the work was nothing but a projection of the man. All the technical tricks in the world could not alter fundamental paucity of soul. And he reflected how he himself was sustained always by a kind of feeling of genius, accompanied by arrogance, dogmatism, intolerance and unshakable conviction. About what? About what, in God's name?

The road curved into the hills, twisted through a canyon-like stream of water, and presently Miss Blue drew up her car where many other more costly cars were already parked. A large house of painted brick, with lights showing in all the windows, dominated the sad, dark land.

"This must be it," she said.

Julian grunted and came out of his dejected musings with a jolt.

"All right," he said. "We'll see what they have to offer."

He swayed up the drive, feeling his liquor the moment he essayed to walk. As they entered, the sound of many voices rose and blended, as if issuing a kind of hopeless challenge to loneliness. Though it was still early, a considerable number of guests had already arrived. The huge principal room was crowded with small groups and with others circulating vaguely about with drinks in their hands. A celebrated musical-comedy comedian, supported by a small clique of retainers, was seated at the piano, accompanying himself to a hit tune, while no one paid the slightest attention to him. Doggedly he continued, as if it were his duty, at any rate, to increase the uproar. Many beautiful young women were on parade, glancing about them with excited but calculating eyes. The familiar faces of popular stars could be seen everywhere. There were some producers present, and gossip writers who were obviously screen-struck and supposed themselves at the moment to be occupying the very crest of the world; and some rich young men of

pleasure, and celebrities in other fields from the East, who had crashed the movie colony from curiosity.

Taking them all in from the doorway, like a child absorbing the brilliant chaos of a fair, Julian had again the impression which all such gatherings never failed to give him: that he was looking at a number of animated wax-works. For the actors seemed to be less living persons than their own shadows come to life: the women's faces had often, indeed, the same waxy perfection upon which were painted a pair of smooth pink cheeks like doll's, and the men's, too, had the same effect except that theirs were tinted brown from careful exposure to the sunlight.

Julian went at once to a table in the hall, poured some whiskey into a glass and squirted it with a syphon. There were all sorts of people whom he knew here, of course, but he was filled with annoyance at the thought of the stale, stock questions he would soon be asked: where he had been, when he had arrived, what he was going to do next. He drank hurriedly as if to prepare himself for this ordeal, only asking someone who had come up at that moment:

"Where's Corley Fane?"

"Oh, he passed out hours ago. Before anybody got here, I guess."

Julian did not say anything in reply. He finished his drink and immediately made himself another. Swallowing this, too, he took a deep breath before starting to enter the room. He became all at once aware that he himself was being as steadily watched, and, turning, observed that Miss Blue was examining him with her peculiar, silent fixity.

He laughed loudly and meaninglessly. Suddenly he did not want to talk to anyone else, as if her company were far more entertaining than any of the well-known persons in the party.

And without knowing in the least where the words came from, he abruptly exclaimed in a voice that had a strangely bullying note:

"Listen, Blue, I've got something to tell you. As my most

intimate friend, I can let you in on something. I've made up my mind to do just as you suggest. By God, you're right! By God, I *am* a great artist! This is no place for me! How I can paint if I want to! And never painted a thing in my life yet I gave a damn about! Blue, you've reformed me! I'll stay out here this time just long enough to pick up a little money—and then—why, then, you'll see!"

His face had an inflamed look. In an excited, confused way, he even believed he now meant what he said. He nodded, as if endorsing some savage and rebellious declaration. He felt enormously relieved, for it rapidly came over him more and more that here was the solution of all his pain and bitterness, the compensation for all his noisy, empty years, a thing that was so simple, yet had never occurred to him before—the romantic idea of doing something for its own sake, the incredible idea of merely doing his best.

"But why do you have to wait at all?" said Miss Blue calmly. "Why don't you begin right away?"

He gave her a startled look.

"Now?" he exclaimed. "How the hell do you think I can do that, I'd like to know! I'm broke, my dear! That's the only reason I came out here anyway."

"A friend of mine," said Miss Blue, "cameraman, built himself a little adobe house way off in the desert by itself. He got sick one time, and did that just to get his health back. I've been to it. I think he'd let anybody use it if I asked him. And it doesn't cost anything there. Why, anybody could live almost a whole month on about twenty dollars!"

Julian stared at her in surprise. An unwilling admiration rose in him for her undramatic casualness. He narrowed his eyes, trying to think. His brain jumped giddily back and forth, unable to cling persistently to any one of his crowding ideas and impressions.

Suddenly he was struck by the childishly agreeable picture of complete disappearance, of a complete contemptuous

betrayal, leaving behind him baffled lawyers, his newly-leased house, a furious Harley Scarborough, Harry Silverstein, and all the rest. The pleasure of such an act swept him violently into the impulse.

"I'll go!" he cried. "And I'll take you along, Blue! I begin to think you *are* that woman I talked about! I'll see what you've got, anyway. Get hold of this cameraman right now, and we'll leave tonight! Come on up—we'll find a phone upstairs—you can't hear yourself think down here."

He banged down his empty glass with an exultant laugh, in the belief that he was perfectly committed to this plan, and that there was nothing in the least false or theatrical about it. Yet beneath his bravado lay the curious wary instinct of the drunkard, cunningly alive to all the hazards his words loftily pretended to disdain.

Miss Blue cast on him an earnest look as if to see for herself just how serious he was. But it was clear that she, too, was now a little excited. She smiled deeply. They started up the stairs together immediately. On the landing Julian tried the first door.

"Might be a phone in here," he said. They entered a bedroom where a man was lying on his back asleep, fully dressed. He was breathing stertorously through an opened mouth. It was undoubtedly the host of the party, the popular composer, Corley Fane. Julian sat down heavily on the bed beside him.

"I'll wait here with the corpse," he said. "You just go ahead—there must be a phone in one of the rooms around. I'll stay right here until you come back."

He heard her go out, and bent his attention on Corley Fane.

"You poor goddamn souse," he said. "Just think! I used to be you. And here I am, risen from your loathsome, dead self. To hell with you!"

Corley Fane mumbled inaudibly. Julian laughed again. He staggered up. He suddenly wanted another drink. A shrewd look came into his eyes. He laughed contemptuously.

What was he up to, anyway, with his talk of flight? What damned nonsense had he just uttered about painting seriously? He'd go downstairs again. There were some pretty women there. He'd pick one. Hell, that was what he'd come for! He fumbled his way to the door. Trying it, he now discovered that he had been locked in.

An astonished oath burst from him. "Why, the dirty little tramp!" But suddenly his expression changed. He began to grin. It was smart of her not to have trusted him! He was tickled by such cynical divination of his character. That girl had something! Not beauty, but something. His resolves came back to him with a pugnacity that they had not had before. This settled it! He imagined that his mouth was fixed in a grim look. He nodded fiercely. By God, he would go through with it after all!

Then the key turned, and she opened the door and faced him, saying:

"It's all right. My friend says we can use the place as long as we like."

Julian patted her shoulder.

"Good girl! Locked me in, too, didn't you? I can see I haven't got a chance with you. So let's get going."

She considered. "We'll have to go back to your house first and get your things—then stop at my room."

"Whatever you say."

They went downstairs and left, just as some new arrivals were coming in. Several of them greeted Julian vociferously. He waved his hand vaguely to them without even trying to disavow who they were.

"Where are you going, Gamble?" one of them cried.

"I'll never see any of you sons-of-bitches again," he answered solemnly.

He clambered into Hester Blue's car once more. From here it was not far to the house which Harley Scarborough had rented for him, and where he had waked up, sick and shaky, only this morning. The Swedish butler let them in and went to fetch a bottle of whiskey at Julian's order

Opening it and now drinking directly from it, Julian followed Miss Blue into his own bedroom, and dropping down into a chair watched her with muzzy wonder as she began to pack his obvious belongings into a large bag. Her intent, earnest eyes, that paid no attention to him, filled him with deep amusement. She frowned and bit her lip in serious concentration. He saw her open a container of paints and brushes, and set it carefully aside with a sound of satisfaction.

"Blue, you're O.K.," he said warmly. "I don't know why I let you alone. Oh, well . . . too drunk, I suppose."

She did not pay any attention, only looking up, when she was finished, to say: "I think that must be nearly everything. If we need anything later, I can always come back for it, of course. And, anyway, there's a town about twenty miles away from this place."

He stuffed the whiskey bottle into his pocket and got up, letting her lug the heavy bag by herself. The fresh air outside dispatched the remainder of his staggered senses like a blow. When he was in the car this time, he instantly fell into a drunken sleep. He awakened dimly on several occasions when it stopped, once on an obscure street and then a little later before a filling station. The lights of the California night danced chaotically in front of his stupefied eyes. He groaned and collapsed again. Soon the little car was bounding along beyond the big city, beyond the sleeping suburbs. It was taking the road south beside the sea, in the direction of Mexico. Hester Blue seemed to be thinking intently, as she stared ahead. She looked desperately tired, yet determined. Only her clear eyes could be perceived in the faint reflections of the dashboard light. Julian slept on heavily, as if poisoned, his head lolling against her shoulder. They drove steadily through the night.

Daylight struck across his eyeballs like the flash of a blank cartridge. Awareness returned in the form of unendurable sensations, mingling nausea with aching, and accompanied by a ghastly weakness.

A quiver, that was itself a frail reflection of the frailty it expressed, passed along Julian Gamble's unstrung nerves. Behind the sensations of his burning head and mouth, and the feeling of being utterly poisoned, and with nothing to fight these but his broken brain, he was possessed by an immense, voiceless sadness. It bored like a worm into the core of his heart.

With dread and anxiety he now looked about him with a haggard stare. He found he was lying on a cot under a thin, soiled blanket. He was on the open porch of a tiny adobe house. Most of his clothes seemed to have been removed sometime previously.

As far as his wasted gaze could carry, the desert spread out before him under a glare of sunlight so intense that it looked as if it had been melted into whiteness. Mountains rambled along the far-off horizon like coloured cinders. There was nothing, no sound, no sight of life, no slightest motion anywhere on the face of the dead and terrifying earth.

Stiff as bristles, some ocatilla trees sprouted up at intervals, with leaves growing out directly from the wands of their trunks like the armless hands of a monster. Here and there were clumps of greasewood trees and cholla bushes with resinous, green spikes, and squat barrel cactus. Not far away was a Joshua tree that had the simulacrum of a twisted, rheumatic fist. But the same profound stillness hung about them all beneath the painful glitter of the sun, monotonous and obscurely mocking.

With a mixture of fear and repulsion, Julian looked away hastily from this panorama. He turned and regarded the tiny house beside him, which stood all alone in this desolation. It appeared to consist of but two rooms, and these were separated by a narrow passageway open to the sky, having no link other than their mutual flooring. Some weather-beaten ox yokes had been hung against the clay walls outside for decoration, and beneath them stood a row of crude, dull-coloured Indian amphorae. The peace everywhere

partook exactly of the horror of a realized death.

It seemed to Julian that his physical misery had been provided with a background that tangibly depicted it, and that was somehow part of it. It was as though he had been transported to hell to endure his sufferings in their proper surroundings.

How had he got here? How, above all, could he escape from here? But he felt too weak to help himself. All at once he noticed on a small hand-hewn table nearby, along with his heaped clothes, a package of cigarettes, and a bottle of whiskey that was still nearly two-thirds full.

Lifting himself with infinite care, while tremblings passed through him like a series of ripples, he tried to reach it. He clawed the air after he rose, while a little whimpering sound issued unashamed from his lips as continuously as a vent of steam.

Unsteadily he managed at length to light a first cigarette. There was an empty jam tumbler underneath the table. He stooped, while his head jumped with fire, picked it up, and succeeded in pouring some spirits into it. Closing his eyes hastily to avoid looking at it, trying hard not to smell it, he then threw the drink down with a backward jerk of his head.

Instantly it seemed to explode in him. He bent over and retched so desperately that it seemed possible he was likely to tear some internal ligament and produce a hemorrhage. The regurgitated whiskey, bitter, sour, and foul, trickled in several small streams down his jaws. Attempting, as he swayed, to secure a firmer clutch on the table, his hand inadvertently knocked the bottle over. With a loud moan, he snatched at it and clumsily managed to retrieve it after several fumbles, but not before all its contents had spilled out except for what amounted to a single small drink.

"Christ!" he exclaimed in an incredulous whisper at himself, at everything, at the extent of his indescribable misery.

He stumbled crazily backward, and flopped down upon the cot again. He put his hands against his ears as if to shut out some maniacal, yelling sound that was beating against

them. The next instant a door clicked and Hester Blue appeared in the narrow passageway. She moved quickly over to him. Without saying a word she put her hand upon his forehead. He gazed up at her wanly. Now he remembered. He remembered everything.

She had brought him here—this fool had done that to him! He loathed her. At the same time he felt desperately dependent on her, and was mortally afraid even of offending her.

In the faint, hesitating voice of a man on his last sickbed, he said pleadingly:

"Get me out of here! Take me away from here!"

He could not have borne it if she had shown protest even by her expression, but her face retained its somewhat wooden calm, and betrayed neither surprise nor disappointment. It was as if she had even expected this.

"All right," she said. "As soon as you feel better. I don't suppose you can eat anything yet, but I'll make you some coffee now. There's an oil stove inside, and there's still some oil in the drum."

She left him. Julian gingerly placed his back against the wall. Wishing he could stop thinking, he helplessly reviewed the insane steps that had brought him to this pass. All that bravado, all that weak, pretentious recklessness about nothing, all those grandiloquent defiances—how disgusting they now seemed! He was a fool—an incredible fool! He had landed himself in this mess with his nonsensical talk of painting as he wished, of painting magnificently. Now all he asked for was to be back in the protecting shams of Hollywood. He was frightened at the thought that he had done something that might have injured him irretrievably there. He would have been frightened of Harry Silverstein today; he would have listened to Harley Scarborough now with eager meekness.

He began to assure himself that nothing like this would ever happen again. And as he did so, with wonder and despair, he was aware that even that was not so. He would

actually get over it and then deliberately bring this nightmare down upon himself once more. He closed his eyes, and a little plaintive sound broke from him and kept pace with his breathing, like a kind of sobbing without tears.

He tried to tear his quivering thoughts away from alarms that were all the more formidable because they were about nothing; it was this that made his reactions to severe attacks of alcohol poisoning so hideous. But he could not think of anything else, and was rescued only by the arrival of Hester Blue with a cup of steaming coffee.

Julian took it with a mumble of sincere gratitude. He tried to sip it while it was still so hot, as if seeking to scald himself in an instinct for heat. A few drops trickled down his throat, warming him with dim, delicious intimations that sometime he might actually feel well again.

Meanwhile, Miss Blue had seated herself idly on the adobe flooring, after a brief casual glance at him. Her back was towards him, and he was obscurely grateful also for that subtlety, without thinking much about her. She scratched idly in the sand with a twig, as if absorbed. With melancholy eyes, and shoulders that tried to meet each other in an invalid's sheltering gesture, Julian gazed above her head. The profound silence seemed even to deepen. The sun was climbing higher still.

His gaze rested forlornly upon the horizon. Through some pass in those hills, over some track of sandy roadway, they had found their way here last night in the darkness, or, perhaps, just as dawn was coming on. Soon he would be going back over that same trail. The world lay beyond there, noisy with health and comforting affirmations. Yet as he now looked in that direction and followed all his longings there, a wave of strange detestation also rode over him in the contemplation of his actual arrival.

He was here now just because he had fled such a condition. He had experienced the liberation of a profound aspiration, accompanied by a perception of virtue. The whiskey which was the cause of his present misery had likewise been the

cause of that liberation. He had been fired by a consciousness of extraordinary potentialities. That was what happened to all drunks, of course. They supposed themselves capable of enormous things, of enormous strength, courage, cleverness, and nobility, if only they cared to try. But they were only drunks. When they were sober they laughed ruefully at these claims and knew they were not so. It was only in his case that the reverse was true.

In his case that the reverse was true? The skeptical inquiry went through him like a kind of shock. He suddenly perceived he was trembling all over again. In a kind of anguished revulsion he bade himself think of something else, of anything else, like a man clinging to the last poor remnants of a shattered sanity.

But insidiously the idea returned, gibing him and goading him without mercy. He sent his fascinated, unhappy eyes over the land that now seemed to be regarding him as with silent attentiveness, indifferent yet ruthlessly amused. It was to this strange place he had come in his drunkenness to paint. Nothing quite like it had ever been painted before, except by such wretched daubers as struggled to attain the blank exactitude of a photograph. Only he, perhaps, had ever comprehended it by this moment of suffering, and knew how it should be said. He was its articulate life, that had been drawn to it by the mysterious impellings of fate. It was chance, and it was not chance. His first tiny cry as an infant had led by infinite ramifications, and the incomprehensible mathematics of a million strands of action, to this very spot and this very moment.

Julian licked his broken lips and, while his pulses hammered, demanded of himself, with greater courage than he had ever before required, whether, after all, he should not respect those drunken ravings which had beheld a truth larger than his stolid health.

It was madness, a faint voice cried in him. But as he went on struggling to shake off the desperate wonder, another voice as quietly assured him that he was facing the decision

of his life, and that if he rejected the offer now, under the test of these appalling, adverse circumstances, he would not be given a second chance. It was now, in his weakness and fear, that he must say yes, if ever.

With dull misery he compared the heady, romantic impulses of the night, whirled into fantastic conviction by alcohol, with this flat, hard, stale, realistic awareness of what such a thing would mean. His mind, racked with his sick feelings, callously ignored these as it raced on. It taunted him with the simple statement that he had not a single excuse. He was here; he could live; he had a companion, a woman who was voluntarily a slave; there was food, peace, protection, quiet, and the incorruptibility of hermitage. The very horror and emptiness of the place were also its assets. He would be alone here in the world, uncontaminated, untempted even by himself. To it he need bring but one thing, a tremendous talent, the tremendous talent he had always arrogantly taken so much for granted as to think it was unnecessary to prove it.

But it must be proved! It must be proved, not in order to bring about something else, but simply to exist of itself. If he went away from here, if he returned to make the impact of his familiar personality upon the familiar, stale world, that too would be a proof, a proof of the exact opposite of his faith in himself.

Altogether shaken, he looked off to one side of the house where Hester Blue's roadster stood as if it had grown there in the arid, pitted earth. As the sweat streamed down his face he told himself he could never survive the exacerbating monotony, the blank, ceaseless toil to which a decision to stay would commit him. It seemed like asking himself to build a pyramid by depositing grain after grain of sand. And what was the good, what did it matter, why should a man compel himself to such suffering, to such exhausting effort for final meaninglessness?

Suddenly it seemed to him he must make an immediate run for that car, climb into it, shut his eyes, and get away

from here as from the voice of the devil. As if trying to reinforce himself, he staggered up towards the table where his clothes lay. He lit another cigarette and this time drew in a gout of smoke without nausea. Hastily he poured out the single small drink he had managed to save. He got it down and this time also retained it.

He laughed weakly but with pride at this exploit. His panic receded.

Just then Hester Blue, looking up at him consideringly, asked mildly: "Do you think you can make it now? Shall we try?"

He cast a smouldering glance upon her. He bit his words off with harsh satisfaction, hearing them himself with wild surprise.

"I'm not going back. We're staying!"

If he had expected to startle her, he was denied even that tiny reward of theatricalism. She remained perfectly placid, only studying him thoughtfully. Yet something contented now emanated from her like the comfort of a cat.

"I'm glad," she said mildly, adding with wild inappropriateness, "I think it's very nice here."

Julian laughed again, as if from an effect of hysterical nerves. He knew he had made the right choice. He would, after all, do great things. All his life's streaming mistakes, all his follies and dissipated energies would at last be justified. More, they would have been proven absolutely right, since in the end they had brought him to this, and had even somehow prepared and equipped him for this. Ravaged right now by illness, by unfathomable trepidation and uncertainties, he exulted, nevertheless, in the thought that he had never really experienced an instant of actual happiness before.

He dropped down on the cot again and was silent for a moment.

"Come over here," he said at last.

She at once obeyed. He put his arms around her and began to kiss her. Her compliant mouth was soft. It seemed

to him as though he were drawing strength from her. In this tremendous solitude something atavistic crept powerfully into his rising lust for her. Weak though he was, he decided he had never hitherto enjoyed a woman as intensely as he was now going to enjoy Miss Blue.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

THE IDEAS OF Alfred Zacharias, as he drove through the dark night to his Catskill summer home to rescue his daughter from her infatuation, were highly upset.

He could not bear lingering on the thought of Flora's actually being in love with David Loewinthal, the impoverished visionary whom he had sent up; every time his brain approached that appalling topic, it leaped away nimbly as if frightened. It was not possible; in any case it was too disagreeable even to face, and yet he certainly had to face it.

How could Flora have been guilty of anything so unpractical? It did not suggest any side of her with which Zacharias was acquainted. Anger against her, a stuffy, middle-aged anger, mingled discordantly with his worship of her.

And why had Myra telephoned to him? Why hadn't she done something herself? She was a woman, and such matters could best be dealt with by a woman. She was just too lazy, that was it! Or was she actually indifferent? Certainly she had never really cared much for Flora, any more than Zacharias himself had liked Alvin. Her prescient eyes, when now and then they had fallen on her pretty daughter, had swiftly passed on, making always a kind of cool, derogatory summary.

But then, except for her son, Alvin, with his insufferable airs of superior knowingness, she did not really admire anyone. She seemed to be disappointed in life in some way that Alfred would not let himself understand. Virtuously he demanded what was the matter with a woman who had everything: a rich, tolerant husband, two healthy, handsome

children, expensive clothes and all the luxuries, and had even retained her looks for an unusually long tenure? What right had such a woman to feel bitter in the appalling contrasts that filled the world?

Yet underneath this accusation, which had the purpose of acquitting him from any responsibility, he had a shadowy conception of the emptiness of all those lives in which an active and even high intelligence is unaccompanied by any means whatever of using it. It was far better to be born commonplace, to be born stupid, than to have brains which are not supplied also with gifts or with the blind-spot of convictions or ambitions.

Far better; and it was the very fact of Myra's brains which had denied her also the consoling absorption in family life, even in the son who was so close to her, since it requires a fundamental stupidity to be engrossed solely by home and children; and the denial of this peaceful satisfaction is only one more of the punishments meted out for intelligence in women.

Alfred thought of her now, as he drove past the whipping, sepulchral lights of the parkway, almost more than of Flora herself. He remembered how once long ago, when he had been on the road and his own nerves were ravaged with quarrels, confusions, and uncertainties, she had suddenly come to him, driving swiftly through some dark night like this one. She had been frantically lonely and had had something desperate about her, and in his arms, as they met, she had melted instantly into a weakness like death, a moment whose magnificence could not be sustained, and in the certainty of whose swift passing there was also an enchanting despair. Did she, too, now so detached and disillusioned, so plainly in charge of her vagaries, ever recall that tiny incident? Or did she, having been granted the self-surrender women eternally asked for, thereafter resent a victor who could never be good enough to merit it, and so come to the bitter conclusion that her lover was also the enemy who had cheated her?

The car sped on, with something oddly, mournfully alive about the unprotesting slavery of the engine and the monotonous sound of the tires slapping the polished roadway. Zacharias, his lips pressed so tightly together as to make his mouth a convex bulge, found comfort in driving thus hard and doggedly. The simple physical action was still another drug, and in his determination to arrive swiftly he could ignore the more uneasy concern about what he was to do when he did get there.

He crossed Bear Mountain Bridge, swept west and north through woods corrupted by cheap excursion centres, repellent-looking camp sites, and various dreary, organized arrangements for respectable and unimaginative pleasure trips—parking places like cinder pits, tawdry picnic grounds with cemented springs, refuse bins, and innumerable signs, warnings, and a general communal hideousness. Sleeping towns sprang up as if under the hand of a tasteless Aladdin, and in a minute had slipped to the rear. In these settlements Alfred could see stores whose windows were embossed with the kosher symbol, and he passed hotels as big as barracks, which proclaimed upon their signs an observance of "dietary laws." All the region hereabouts was exclusively racial during the Summer and the only persons who really inhabited the land were a few suspicious and ignorant farmers.

Once more the Jews had huddled together, not for trade, nor even for protection, but for the exciting pleasure of association. For the monstrous self-deception of most Gentiles made the realism of even the most stupid Jew appear by contrast humorous and enlivening. Perhaps that was why Jews were always credited with being so universally clever.

Now the land began to descend the westerly slopes of the range, becoming all at once more rolling and open, with mountains and ravines in miniature. Alfred, taking the last turns without thought, drove through the pink stucco pillars of his estate.

The house, like an erratically shaped barn, brooded in an immense stillness, as he slid up the drive and pointed the car into the garage. He shut off the motor and stepped out.

The hot silence everywhere was oppressive; there was something satiric about it, as though his puny desperation were being observed by something mocking yet impersonal.

He stood for a moment looking up at the huge, ugly house that reflected the soul of some vulgar architect. He had been very proud of it years ago, when he had first acquired it. It was still the finest house in the region. But his taste, too, had improved through the years, and now he was vaguely ashamed of it in connection with such fine, cultivated friends as J. B. Weisenthal and Bernard Samuels. He seldom came up any more, leaving the place completely to Myra, who did not seem to care what people thought anyway.

But as he stood gazing at it now, he was not thinking in terms of wood and stone or costly bric-a-brac. Inside, a number of human beings were peacefully sleeping—his servants, people whom he paid and hence surely must own, like any other thing that is paid for; his wife, and somewhere, too, in the ornate bedroom, his daughter; and down the hall, perhaps, smiling arrogantly in his presumptuous dreams, David Loewinthal.

Zacharias suddenly smiled, too, but without good nature or even the lofty assurance of power—a smile that mainly outlined the skull beneath the flesh, and only by accident was not an uneasy scowl. Then at last he let himself in, walking like a conspirator, and stalked up the stairs asking himself why he had been at such pains to get here in such a rush. For now, at three in the morning, there was clearly nothing to be done except to wait for the daylight.

But as he moved down the hall in the direction of the room he kept for himself, he saw a splinter of light beneath the doorway of Myra's room; and at once, without knocking, entered.

Myra was lying in her bed, reading. She looked extra-

ordinarily contented there, arousing a perverse wish to hatter that cozy softness, that care, that sensuous restfulness, by violently tearing the light covers off and dumping her on the floor without warning. The pillows behind her were adjusted top delicately—even their hollowed spaces were in order—and the light flowed with measured gentleness toward the pages of the book, a detective story, that he was holding. On the bedside table next to her were arrayed a number of comforts; a thermal water carafe, a box of mints, cigarettes and a lighter, ash trays, a glass, a neat travelling clock, and a pile of still other books in glossy slip jackets.

Her hair still shone from earlier brushing, and fell like a self-caress upon her shoulders. Her skin had a burnished, tinted look, too, and was not smeared at the moment with insightly cosmetic fats. She was remarkably handsome.

But this result, of course, was not achieved simply by chance: it was desperate hard work, as Alfred knew, for a woman to keep herself up to the mark, once all youth had gone. He wondered vacantly why she went to such efforts. It was not in the hope of lovers; indeed, there had never been that incentive, and she undoubtedly had been as faithful to him as she was indifferent to him. She had, of course, her own circle of friends, all those thick-featured musicians like so many pigs with souls, but whenever one came out of his trance into a less mathematical sensuality, she promptly got rid of him. Yes, music and detective stories—that was all that seemed to sustain her. Countless thousands of detective stories, so that one asked, how did they all get written? But Myra never plumed herself with the usual detective-story reader's assumption of a charming facetiousness, a lovable weakness, that paradoxically proved one's superior taste and intelligence: she appeared to think they were quite good enough for her.

She was certainly in perfect command of herself now. Her eyes had that critical, detached look that Alfred disliked so intensely. She was gazing at him just as if he

existed solely for her amusement, and so far as she was concerned had no other function.

"Well," she exclaimed, "didn't take you very long to get here, I see!"

Zacharias sat down heavily upon the foot of the bed. The numbness that he had taken in his apartment that evening had seemed to wear off in waves, retreating and then advancing again. A feeling of torpor from it descended upon him now.

"Tell me just what happened," he demanded in a low, exhausted voice.

She shrugged her shoulders, sending them that little intimate, appraising glance with which a woman reminds herself of her most precious possessions.

"I already told you," she murmured. "They fell in love—or, rather, she did. It happened the moment we left—it was just like that. Now they're both crazy—they look rather dazed. And so irritatingly solemn about it. It's embarrassing."

She flapped the book she was still holding, and her glance travelled to her long, ringless fingers, and rested upon them with the stare of a connoisseur.

Alfred groaned. "And with that terrible boy! O, what a fool! A pauper—a good-for-nothing fellow! I can't believe it yet, that Flora could be in her right mind!"

His emotion had coarsened his accent and even reduced his pretentious vocabulary to the language of his unadvantaged youth. Myra examined him with her mouth pursed up into a circle, as if she were silently whistling.

"What an awful snob you are," she said genially.

Alfred twisted his shoulders with a resentful movement. He instantly attacked her.

"And what I want to know is, why didn't *you* do something when you saw what was happening?"

"I did," said Myra coolly. "I sent for you."

Alfred's voice insensibly grew louder. A shrill sound cut jaggedly back and forth through the level line of his whispering, like a chart of some seismic disturbance.

"Then I got to do everything myself, huh? Like I was her mother instead of only her father! That's it, sure, you're just too lazy! You won't do anything for your own daughter, a little baby like her!"

"She's no baby—she knows what she wants," said Myra without any show of rancour. "And maybe she's right, too; her instinct is just as good as your ideas—probably better."

She reflected for a moment, while Zacharias peered at her with animosity that at least kept at bay more disagreeable reflections.

"Anyway," she concluded, "I don't think there's anything one can exactly *do* about such things. Because no matter what you do, they always really settle themselves by themselves. Interfering simply makes them worse."

Zacharias clenched his small, stubby fists so that they resembled dumplings. The veins swelled in his forehead under his tight, matted cap of hair. His eyes, red from the beating wind of his drive, had a ferociously porcine look.

"Do!" he cried. "I'll do something—I'll show you!"

But just what indeed could he do? He shrank even from the pretence of trying to upbraid Flora in the morning, of having it out with her with honest bluntness, of ordering her to return to her senses just so. Such things did not happen like that any more. Fathers had lost their rightful authority; in a democracy even the children of the Jews insisted on being democratic, and hence insultingly independent. But suddenly the idea came, and he finished exultantly:

"I'll take her abroad—that's what I'll do! I'll take her abroad right away—yes, in the next twenty-four hours!"

"Oh, why don't you go to bed?" Myra exclaimed wearily. She waved her book idly, as if she desired only to get back to her reading and were hoping to wave him away also by that gesture.

He glared at her, seeking for a retort, but found too many. He was certain that he altogether detested her. He knew he had never really been able to beat her. Again and again,

years ago, he had thought he had done that, finding her willing to play any game with him and dispassionately enjoying any game. But at the very instant that he supposed himself the victor and supposed her won at last, crushed in the humility of a devotion that now would not falter, she exasperatingly righted and recovered herself and was there again calmly smiling, humorously critical, leaving him with the feeling that she was all alone still, and so he was all alone, too.

And a curious feeling of frustration came over him now, in the conflict between his resentment of her and his unwilling admiration of her. He had the strangest longing to seize and outrage her like a maniac, this woman of more than forty-five; to use love in its simplest form as an attack. He felt as if he were actually restrained only by a kind of impotence. In the end he relapsed into ignominious weakness, as if inviting her to punish him still more.

"If you only knew how rotten I feel!" he cried with a whine of self-pity.

But she did not even answer this time, and emitting a feeble, scornful sound, Zacharias made an undignified departure.

He reached his own room and dragged his clothes off in a kind of sad enervation. He dropped down naked in the warm Summer night upon the sheets of his bed. He lay on his back, staring up into the darkness. How he needed rest—rest and the chance to build up his energies! He stirred and moaned, saying to himself that he would never sleep now, that he was too excited to sleep, too tired to sleep, and moreover the dust-flecked light was beginning already to filter through the chinks of the Venetian blinds. And while he was saying this in dejected exhaustion, he fell asleep.

He awoke nauseated, stiff in all his joints, and blank with hopelessness. His first consciousness came with the mournful wonder as to why he should feel this way. It was not that he was old, and certainly not that he did not take care of himself. Why, he watched himself as carefully as a keeper

in constant attendance upon a suicidal lunatic! Yet now he had returned to the awareness of life only with acute suffering.

He stumbled like a drunkard into his bathroom. For a moment not even Flora and her intolerable folly mattered; nothing mattered except the blind, groping longing to feel better. He gazed dully at the well-stocked medicine shelf and then swallowed a couple of caffeine tablets, and chased these down with a generous dose of spirits of ammonia. Then he turned the hot-water tap in the tub full blast, poured in a large quantity of pine-scented salts, and presently lowered himself into the steaming water with curious groans of anguish and pleasure. He lay back fully immersed, closing his eyes and not even stirring a toe, with a thick cloudy look on his face as though submitting to some lascivious caressing. After a long time he pulled himself up into the cooler air and clambered out. He staggered a little with weakness.

"Oh, God," he mumbled, "how bad I feel! Nobody knows . . . To hell with all of them!"

Labouring and puffing, he began to pull on some clothes of a lurid, sports type: an open, yellow-linen shirt, a grass-green jacket, and a pair of flannel trousers that made too much of his paunch.

Now for the first time he examined the problem before him, plunging into action boldly with the habit of many years. Myra, of course, would stay in bed, as always, until noon; he would have to tackle Flora alone—a good thing, too. He would get some breakfast and immediately find her. Compressing his eyelids with determination, he firmly descended the stairs.

But when he reached the breakfast room, he saw that the lovers were already there and were now lingering, waiting for him, having by some unknown means divined his arrival in the night. Their eyes leaped upon him as he entered in an intensely eager greeting but without surprise. It was Alfred who was senselessly startled at finding them there.

Against the background of the somewhat dark, long room,

with its sideboard covered with dishes that no one was going to eat, with too many ornate silver services, and its walls banked by too many framed pictures of game and fruit and plaques of varnished, stuffed fish, he saw the two young people who were so sure they knew everything and that there was nothing the matter with life if one could only have one's tangible desires.

And they sat expectant, doubtless in the belief that he had rushed here simply to congratulate them, and was overjoyed at the prospect of one of those alliances which combine families that share the same motivating interest.

What an insufferable delusion! It was not that Zacharias supposed himself even now any less a Communist than he had ever been. It was simply that he was convinced that he had adapted himself sensibly to the world as it was, while retaining his opinions as a harmless intellectual ideal. And, of course, in his case his retention of them had served his material interest, an interest whose importance only fools ever ignored.

It was actually possible that the young man before him, the handsome, sensitive-looking, passionately-convinced young man, was such a one. Zacharias' guilty glance flashed quickly from his face to Flora's. Her expression was tender, like a woman saying good-bye to the lover whom she will not see again, and whose withstood love seems at last precious, now that it is to be discarded forever. She got up suddenly and without a word went over swiftly and kissed her father.

Zacharias felt as instantly overcome as a fighter knocked down by the first blow in the first round. He was wretched at the realization of his own weakness before her.

Meekly he sat down, hearing himself with shame mumbling a greeting that had all the affectations of cordiality. His eyes, trying to hide their sick expression, observed Flora as she poured him a cup of coffee. How delicately made she was! There was something troubling about the exquisiteness of such over-precision: the almost painfully fine Arabic nose,

the perfection of the small, warm mouth, the absurdity of the open, limpid gaze. For the first time Alfred wondered whether by any chance the object of his adoration was only a beautiful automaton.

He glanced back at David Loewinthal with the look that seeks to tear down and penetrate. When he had met him in his office, he remembered he had half contemptuously liked him, and certainly thought him harmless. He thought neither of those things now. He perceived it was something more than good looks which had accomplished this unhappy revolution in his daughter.

A fool, yes, but one with pride and courage. He was afraid of nothing, that was what his confident look said, neither of attack nor of the corruptions of admiration. He was not concerned with men as individuals. Nothing but his idea would ever mean much to him. It was perfectly believable that he was not only not impressed with the luxury by which he was now surrounded, but that he was not even aware of it.

His smile was frank, his voice had an assured note which made Alfred secretly long to strike him. He said he was glad Alfred had come up at once like this, for no doubt Mrs. Zacharias had told him the news. But unfortunately he himself had to return to New York almost immediately—on the noon train today, in fact. He did not expect, though, to be held there more than three or four days. When he came back, he and Flora had decided to be married at once up here in the country.

This was the time—this was the time to let him have it—for Alfred to inform him with a blast how he felt about his calm, outrageous presumption! Instead, he was fearful only lest they read his true feelings, for he could not believe he was managing to keep the revulsion and fury that seethed in him out of his expression.

But the lovers, obsessed by the drama of their inviolable selection, and caught perhaps by the exciting evocations of those children who demanded to be born from them, were too lost in each other's nearness to have the necessary

observation left to see what was going on in his afflicted mind. They had that look of sleek calm and careful avoidance of each other's presence by which in public lovers often proclaim the intoxicating secret they share in private.

Zacharias, taking no chances, kept his face bent down toward his plate, eating rapidly and mechanically, and warning himself desperately to keep cool, to use his head, to watch his step, to think clearly, while all the time he longed only to shake both fists over his head and emit Oriental screams of vituperation upon both of them.

He picked up a muffin and nibbled at it like a rodent, but he was scarcely able to swallow the crumbs he thus had bitten off. He saw that they were waiting for him to speak. His hand went out in a nervous fumbling and plucked a toothpick from a bowl, a habit that not even Myra had been able to eradicate in him. Trying by its help to control a kind of trembling going on in his wrists, he managed to fix upon his face a grotesquely paternal smile.

"Well!" he exclaimed with an odious jocularly that almost startled him. "It's certainly come as a big surprise! But, of course, Flora, since you and I have planned to go abroad——"

He was stopped by a burst of inexplicable laughter from her. What could have led her to see anything funny about that remark? How had she turned it into some mysterious joke or other unless—unless, indeed, she supposed that he himself had meant it to be taken that way! Yes, that was it, certainly; in the blindness of her obsession she had interpreted his matter-of-fact phrase as a piece of irresistible dryness. And any further doubts he might have had on the matter were scattered by her first words when she recovered herself.

"To think I actually wanted to do that more than anything else only a week ago!"

And David Loewinthal said with a quite charming smile: "You can take her abroad, Mr. Zacharias, as soon as I get tired of her."

Flora looked swiftly over at her lover, and Alfred covertly watched her. Her eyes lingered upon the egotistic young man with a gaze at once menacing and doting. Then her lashes dropped suddenly like a soft stroke of fingers. She stared away again, as though hurt by something, as though striving rather desperately to put her emotions in order. Yet the moment had contained nearly everything within the range of a sexual relationship: unutterable subjection, unscrupulous threat, and the sad fear of time. It was that self-destructing look which, in defiance of instinct itself, welcomes the hopeless struggle to mesh one identity with another without loss of ego.

Alfred's spirits dropped even lower than his own helplessness and indecision had previously sent them. He saw that this was no mere infatuation of Flora's that he had to cope with, full of volatile, juvenile ardours, but a perfectly mature passion. She was no doubt far more in love with the young man than he would ever be with her.

Perfunctorily, with a ghastly simulation of interest, Alfred asked his prospective son-in-law why he had to hurry back to New York so precipitately—was it just his job?

"Yes, just my job. . . . But it's the kind of job I think you'd like, Mr. Zacharias!" Loewinthal answered with a rather grim smile. He hesitated, then doubtless feeling altogether sure of the company in which he now was, and encouraged by a nod from Flora, he plunged into a confidential explanation.

His somewhat high voice had the true fanatic's pitch. It was eloquent, and his eyes burned as he spoke of the indignities and callous treatment to which merchant sailors were still subjected.

"I know! I've signed the articles myself."

But all that was going to be done away with at last—and for good! For months the plans had stealthily been forming. . . . The young man's voice, shaken by its own ardour, went on in a sort of exultant chant. Details battered meaninglessly against Alfred's ears . . . something about a couple of

minor longshoremen agitators named Joseph Burke and Eli Moscovitz, who were to be slugged and knocked down by employees of the Capstan Line. But these employees had only been skilfully spotted there! In reality they were sympathizers—members of the party—though no one not in the secret would ever learn that.

Thereafter, in angry protest, the whole personnel of the longshoremen's organization could be counted upon to walk out, followed by all ships' crews now in port. These had already been encouraged rightfully to demand first-cabin fare henceforth, and to give obedience only to orders approved by their own committees at sea; and until these demands were met all Atlantic sailings could be tied up.

And to see that no details of this stratagem, which he himself had chiefly organized, would go wrong at the last moment, Loewinthal was now needed back in New York. No one, of course, least of all in the Capstan Line, had any idea the obscure sub-editor was mixed up in it! They were watching Burke and Moscovitz! He had worked secretly from the start.

For some while Zacharias had understood nothing of what he was saying, only observing his face and gestures with detestation as he eagerly spoke; but suddenly the words cracked against his ear and made sense, and he sat up with a quiver, scarcely able to master his indignation.

He realized that the maritime tie-up which Loewinthal and his friends were seeking to bring about—and probably would bring about—would produce losses of many hundreds of thousands of dollars. With nostrils flared as if apprised of a disagreeable odour, he felt as if he were really going to choke. What made it most unbearable of all was the fact that he was obviously supposed to be hearing all this with gratified approval.

And suddenly a final grotesque irony rang with a metallic clang in his brain. He himself owned a small block of stock in the Capstan Line! It was *his* money, acquired by his unsleeping effort and the talent of his special dexterity,

which Loewinthal was now trying to take away from him! Into this connivance, moreover, his own daughter had been drawn against him in an imbecilic self-attack upon her expectations of inheritance. And here he sat, nodding warmly, glassily pretending to smile, and struggling to keep an expression of loathing out of his eyes.

Insufferably, Flora just then chose to exclaim:

"You see? You see how clever he is, Father?"

A pain jumped like a taut nerve just below Alfred's diaphragm, and he set his hand there with a frightened look in which there was also a ludicrous suggestion of reproach.

"You'll have to excuse me," he mumbled. "I'm not feeling well this morning—I'll get something—I'll——"

"Is there anything I can do, Father?"

"No, no, I'll be all right. I'll see you later. Excuse me."

He got up and abruptly retreated. When he reached his own room he dropped down upon his unmade bed and sat there listening to his own hard, regular breathing. The pain began slowly to recede, and as it did so, his mind advanced step by step to the reluctant absorption of pangs less physical. He had not only failed to do anything, but, it now seemed to him, he had by his disgusting acquiescence made it impossible ever to do anything in the future. How could he have been so supine?

A moan burst faintly from him and he felt at that moment he could gladly have stamped upon David Loewinthal like a spider, while a paradoxical hatred for Flora rode over him in the knowledge that it was his adoration of her that had robbed him of the strength to do so. In imagination he saw himself stalking down the stairs again, confronting the two of them, and then sweeping aside with one violent gesture all his previous slavish agreement, and telling them in cool, level tones exactly what he thought of them, and utterly forbidding their disgraceful marriage. But in the dismal reality that he was doing no such thing, and would be unable to do any such thing, he moaned again. All at once he lurched up with a red face, startled by the most obvious

idea. He could at least stop this dangerous radical from achieving his purpose. He could betray him! All he had to do was to get in touch instantly with Michael O'Rourke, the big-shot Tammany boss. He had given O'Rourke's son a small part in a number two company only last season, and O'Rourke would do him any favour in the hope of advancing his boy. There were, of course, a dozen ways in which Loewinthal could be framed.

But he had no sooner snatched at the phone by his bed and demanded long distance than he abruptly revised his plan. It would be even better to go directly to Rensselaer Brock himself, chairman of the Capstan Line! Let him do his own dirty work! He had met Brock on one or two occasions—a tall, thin snob with flinty eyes. He was no fool, either, and as hard as nails.

While he waited nervously for the connection, some uneasy voice inside him seemed to cry imploringly, "Wait! Wait!" But the promise of balm to his own humiliated feelings was too tempting to be resisted, and he flung away his caution as he had once long before. Soon he was put through to the private office of the shipping magnate. Though the walls of his bedroom were heavy enough to be perfectly soundproof, Alfred spoke in a tone so subdued by fear as to be scarcely audible.

"Speak up, speak up, can't you?" said Brock once or twice.

Sitting in the locker-room of the country club that afternoon, sipping the mineral water that the steward had just brought him, Alfred felt immeasurably more soothed, quite hopeful even. He began to decide he had largely upset himself—his nerves were out of order. Wasn't everything in the end physical, and wasn't he, after all, a sick man?

Alfred scarcely knew anyone here except by sight. He was only a desultory member and an indifferent golfer. But today he had felt an intense need to escape from the house and the proximity of the lovers. Feigning illness, he had remained in his room all the rest of the morning and then

had sneaked out to come over here and lunch alone. Afterwards he had played a few holes, not even nine, and dawdled through most of the afternoon.

But the exercise, though not enough to tire him, had relaxed his tightened nerves. Yes, it had been ridiculous of him to become so excited and upset! Nothing had happened, and nothing would happen if only he used his head and acted with cleverness and wariness.

He was rather glad now that he had immediately brought up the project of the European trip and that Flora had refused it. It gave him something to work on; in any case, a focus for struggle. Flora was a warm-hearted, impulsive little thing. He would put himself in the tender position of her ally and confidant these next few days, ceaselessly gentle, patient, and sympathetic, and watch like a hawk for the first opening. Perhaps this would consist merely in some twilight mood of affection mingled with the kindness of impending parting. Then he would ask her his last favour: to take the trip with him just as they had planned. He would be wistful, humbly pleading. If everything were timed right, she might surrender.

And once abroad—once abroad!—there would be ways to keep her there! He would invent business that prevented his return, he would tempt her constantly with new pleasures, and he would throw every kind of man across her path, young men who had far more to offer than David Loewinthal ever could—men just as intense, just as good-looking, but with great fortunes, titles even, to say nothing of more cultivated interests! In time might she not look back upon Loewinthal with the uncertainty of a dimming perspective, and, finally, even with profound dubiety? It could be—it really could be!

Meanwhile, long before this, David Loewinthal himself had arrived in New York and walked gullibly into whatever trap Brock had prepared for him. Just what would Brock do? It was hard to say, but it would surely be something decisive. Perhaps Loewinthal would be the one to be slugged

into unconsciousness! And Brock had promised to keep Alfred's share in the matter completely in the dark. Loewinthal would instantly believe that it was one of his own crowd who had ratted on him, an easy decision since such things happened so often.

Over Zacharias' face there now ran a smile of satisfaction. He enjoyed the contemplation of his own treachery. It was delightful not only to pay back Loewinthal in his secret way for his insufferable claims, but Flora, also, for having dared to encourage them.

Alfred downed the heel of his mineral water in a gurgling swallow, set his glass upon the wooden bench, and rose to his feet. He had managed to make time pass; the afternoon must already be descending into the long Summer approach to dusk. Besides, the air in here was foul and stuffy; it was dangerous to inhale any more of it than one had to; one might easily become ill that way.

He drove home peacefully. But as he walked up the porch and entered his gaudy, misshapen house, a curious spasm of alarm rode over him. A kind of ominous stillness filled the shaded rooms as with the hushed gloom of a museum. The house seemed to speak with a tongue of its own, warning him that something was amiss. He could find no one about. Then one of the maids told him that his wife was out attending to her rose garden, and at once, with a trepidation that he tried to assure himself was completely ridiculous, Zacharias went out to seek her.

Myra, in a wide-brimmed straw hat, and equipped with gardening gloves and shears, was indeed calmly working among her flowers. But as she looked up at his approach, he instantly, from long knowledge of her, read in her special glance that his intuitions had been correct: something disagreeable had happened. But he knew her too well, also, to let her see his own anxiety. The least impatience would arouse a perverse cruelty in her, and make her delay even longer whatever unpleasant information she had.

Trying to control himself, he sat down on the grass,

hugging his knees there. She snipped off a dead twig with careful concentration.

"Have a good game?" she inquired idly, squinting at the rosebush with her head on one side.

"Oh, fair," he drawled, and added as if perfunctorily, "everything all right here?"

She put down her shears, found a loose cigarette in the pocket of her smock, lit it with agonizing slowness, blew the smoke voluptuously through her nostrils, watched the breeze whip it away, and then said with a cool smile:

"You *have* done it, haven't you?"

"What?" he stammered. "What do you mean?"

"Loewinthal was arrested as soon as he reached New York. A telegram came."

Alfred was unable to repress a start of pleasure. With difficulty he kept himself from even rubbing his hands together. He tried to assume a shocked tone as he repeated: "Arrested!"

Myra's fine eyes observed his acting with contemptuous detachment. She added quietly, as if interested only in watching the effect on him:

"Flora's left, too."

"Flora?" he cried confusedly. "But why—?" A frightened feeling at something she had left unsaid jumped into his accusing voice: "And you let her? You let her go?"

"I couldn't have stopped her. Besides, you shouldn't mind, since you've got the boy locked up."

Zacharias did not waste time even trying to deny this any longer. "Why should she want to go?" he quavered foolishly.

In the same impassive, deliberate tone, Myra exploded her bombshell:

"She left in order to avoid seeing you again."

The colour slid with an incredible soft rapidity out of Zacharias' face. He looked curiously old and repulsive all at once. He put up a shaky hand as if against a blow, faltering, and no longer trying to pretend anything.

"But she couldn't, she couldn't have found out! Brock promised me! There was no way——"

Myra's eyes took in his writhings with distaste.

"Everyone always knows the enemy of anything he's in love with. You underestimate the instinct of quite stupid people."

He looked at her blankly as if not comprehending a word, and then pushed himself to his feet like a ball lifted on two unsteady poles.

"I'll go to New York right after her—right now! I'll bring her back——"

"I wouldn't advise you to try," said Myra.

He gave her a furious look, then suddenly sacrificed his pride to get her help.

"What should I do? Tell me! Tell me what I should do now!"

She flung her cigarette away and seemed to study it where it fell in the grass.

"Do?" she said after a long pause. "There's nothing much you can do. She'll never trust you again! The best thing now, undoubtedly, is to keep away from her. But whatever happens, don't apologize! Then she'll never forgive you. It would be much better to go on fighting her than that! Still, perhaps you'd better get the boy out of jail as soon as you can. I suppose Mike O'Rourke can manage that for you." She slowly shook her head. "You've certainly fixed things, all right, my dear Alfred! What you ought to have done in the first place, of course, was to have settled a lot of money on him—fifty thousand dollars, say. You could have tried to make a capitalist out of him, and turn him into yourself, and then maybe in time Flora would have found him out. But still I'm not sure even that would have worked in his case. No, on second thought I'm sure it wouldn't. But as it is, you've just made him a romantic hero. Oh, yes, you'd better get him out of jail as soon as you can! And they'll marry now, of course, no matter what you do!"

She bent to snip off another dead twig with the most

precise care. Zacharias stamped his foot impotently upon the gravel path between the rosebushes. He shook his fist at nothing, and an inarticulate imprecation broke from him, accompanied by a curious wailing sound.

"Oh, my God!" he cried distractedly. "A thing like this has to happen, and you sit there and cut roses! I got only myself to rely on. But I'll get her back in spite of you! I'll make her see it was all because of the way I feel about her and wanted to protect her. I'll bring her back here tomorrow—you'll see——"

He broke off, conscious of the maddening smile in her eyes; and anxious then only to hurt her if he could, he flung an inspired taunt at her:

"Oh, I know it's not easy! Because I never treated her like you done with that son of yours, making him eat out of your hand, spoiling him, and stopping him from ever getting away from you. Because you've ruined *him*, that's what!"

It was well aimed. Myra flushed.

"Don't try to arrange Alvin's life the way you have Flora's!" she said sharply. "You can keep your stupid hands off him."

Zacharias rested upon his small victory and gave her no answer other than a scornful grunt. He turned upon his heel and walked rapidly in the direction of the garage. If he had not felt Myra's following, angry eyes upon his back, he would even have broken into a run. Three minutes later he was driving on his way to New York at a more breakneck pace than the one in which he had come up.

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

"FLORA, HURRY UP! Why don't you come now, when I'm waiting for you like this!" Zacharias whispered passionately. Then he turned and looked self-consciously behind him, for

though he had uttered the words out loud, he had spoken only to the walls in the empty room.

Not a sound could be heard anywhere, not even the muffled footfalls of the Chinese shuffling about in the kitchen, and a despondent loneliness and stillness held the apartment as though clutched in a dead hand. The evidences of luxury, the soft chairs, shaded lights, and thick rugs, seemed only to accent this feeling of being entirely shut off from life in a kind of sardonically padded tomb.

It was now nearly nine o'clock in the evening, and after a number of hours Zacharias was still roving pointlessly up and down his apartment, often with his watch cupped in the palm of his hand, with the frown of someone who is incensed by a selfishly delayed appointment. But he had looked at the watch so often, and with such glazed eyes, that he could no longer remember what time it actually was.

He had hurried to get here, as if frantically running from something rather than towards a desired goal. He had taken the most suicidal chances, passing cars on hills and weaving recklessly in and out of traffic in a way that offered fate the opportunity to put him out of his misery any time it cared. And as he drove thus, somehow escaping not only accidents but also the notice of the highway police, he wore an expression of gloomy anxiety. For his heart seemed to him to be beating erratically, he noted with alarm, and he scared himself still further by the reminder that it was of heart disease that two of his uncles had died. And occasionally, as he swept around a curve at more than fifty miles an hour, he adjusted the ventilating windshields to keep a dangerous draft from his neck.

The needlessness of his foolhardy rush was made plain to him the moment he entered his apartment. The Chinese told him with an irritatingly senseless giggle that his daughter had arrived hours ago but had stayed only a few minutes before going out again.

"She'll be back for dinner," said Alfred confidently, without the least reason for asserting this. "Now get up a nice

little dinner for the two of us, Ling. Oh, yes, she'll be mack all right." He smiled wanly.

However, when he went prowling into her bedroom, his spirits lifted and he felt that he had been right. For though the drawers of her bureau had been pulled out and hurriedly overturned as if in an act of burglary, and their contents spilled all over the floor and the bed, a small bag which she had evidently brought with her from the country gaped open and remained only half filled, so that it was clear that whatever preparations she had been making for departure had not yet, at any rate, been completed.

Zacharias now recalled his panicky decision—which was the only part of Myra's advice he had accepted—to try to secure David Loewinthal's release; and, going to the phone at once, he looked up Michael O'Rourke's private number in his address book, and called his home. A woman's voice informed him that the politician was out but was expected in shortly. Zacharias left his own name and number, with the message to call him as soon as O'Rourke came in, saying it was urgent.

Then he sat down to wait.

There was no use in formulating any plan or even deciding upon an attitude, for both of these must come from Flora's attitude itself and spring instantly to life to complement the special conditions they discovered. Zacharias occupied himself instead with the most futile regrets over his intemperate impulse. How could he ever have done anything so abysmally short-sighted? And how was he going to prevent this distressing marriage now, even after he had humbled himself and crawled back into Flora's forgiveness? How, indeed, for that matter, was he going to win her forgiveness? But he could not think that that was impossible, even though he remembered Myra's chilly voice saying that Flora would never trust him again. Surely she could not so easily forget all his past goodness to her, all his insane adoration of her—such things as that could not simply be wiped out completely by one unhappy misstep, a single, enraged blunder!

He picked up the manuscript of a play he had promised to report on, and read the opening directions. But the words did not even complete any meaning for him. He threw it down, walked to the window, observing far below him the traffic moving mechanically up and down the avenue, stopping and then going on again like the obscure, incomprehensible manœuvering of an ant army. Exhaustedly, he pulled out his watch again.

The Chinese came into the room again with an expression of blankness that was also an inquiry. He had been in twice before and had been sharply ordered to wait a little on each occasion. This time in a disagreeable, peevish tone Zacharias said that he might as well serve dinner now, as his daughter was going to be a trifle late.

He sat down at the table that was so preposterously large for him, and helped himself automatically to what was brought. But he could not eat a particle of the several warmed-up courses. He experienced a strange, swollen feeling, as though it would be quite impossible to get a morsel past the pressures in his throat. He messed up his plate each time, tried to swallow a forkful of something, and then angrily gave up. He pushed everything back like a petulant child. Getting up, he crossed to a sideboard and poured himself a stiff drink of excellent brandy from a decanter, smelled of it, and immediately set it down, untasted, with a shudder of repugnance. Going into his bathroom, he mixed a glass of bromides, instead, and returned with this to the living room.

He sat down, rose without an idea, and promptly sat down again. Then after a moment he began to march back and forth in a crazed restlessness, trying to reduce this pace to a saunter, like a man engrossed with a minor problem. But he was not actually thinking at all. He was suffering simply and directly without the relief of the orderly processes of logic. His vitality, whipped forward by his nerves, had nothing whatever to spend itself on, and so seemed to recoil upon him, feeding gluttonously upon his unhappiness.

All at once the phone rang. He ran to it, and was startled that so short a distance should leave him so breathless. Pressing his hand against the receiver, he struggled to recover his wind before he spoke. When he finally did, in a nonchalant tone that nevertheless reported his agitation with perfect clearness, he was disgusted by hearing only a falsetto voice ask: "Is Charley there?"

"Wrong number!" he shouted furiously. He was about to get up again when he suddenly recollected O'Rourke. It was undoubtedly useless to call him a second time, but at least it was something to do. He was then surprised to learn the politician was now home. In a moment O'Rourke answered the phone himself, saying that he had just at that moment come in. His voice, jovial, professionally Irish, and protecting its owner by the manipulation of an easy charm, brought up his face vividly in front of Zacharias—like a new brick in which were set two insignificant, shrewd eyes of as bright a blue as any turquoise.

"What's on your mind, my boy? Anything I can do for you at all?"

Alfred began to explain, but got no farther than a few words when he was interrupted by O'Rourke's loud laugh.

"Why, that's all been taken care of already! It was your own daughter that called me up this afternoon upon the same matter. I guess you didn't know. But don't be worrying about that any more. It was no serious charge. I sent word down to the precinct right away. Sure, it's all been handled by this time—the boy's out and free long ago!"

A quiver passed through Zacharias like a ripple of muscles in the belly of a horse. He replied something—he did not know what—heard the borough boss make a jocular but significant inquiry about his son's theatrical prospects, and heard himself recklessly promising to find a good part for him next season. When he was at last able to ring off, Zacharias discovered that his face was streaming with perspiration.

For he knew now where Flora was, and the knowledge filled him with uneasy tension.

At the same time he shook his head with admiration of Flora's cleverness and capability in calling O'Rourke herself. How did she know enough to do that? His daughter, of course! But that did not matter now; all that mattered was to find her at once and then try to bring her back here.

But how was he to locate Loewinthal? Ah. Maury Meyer would know! Maury had unearthed him in the first place, undoubtedly was acquainted with all his habits, was, perhaps, even a particular crony of his. Zacharias whirled the dial so rapidly as to leave out one of the numerals, and so had to do it all over again.

Soon he heard Maury's hoarse, reassuringly familiar voice on the wire.

"Maury, look! Do you know where I can find David Loewinthal right away? Do you happen to know his address?"

"Yes."

"Well, give it to me!" Alfred demanded feverishly.

There was a curious pause. Alfred could almost feel Maury thinking on the other end of the line. Then the hoarse voice answered, delivering the information, and Zacharias hastily jotted it down on a pad.

"And the phone number?"

"He hasn't got a phone."

"Oh! It doesn't matter. Thanks."

"Wait a minute," said Maury quickly, before Alfred could ring off. "I just wrote you a letter."

"You wrote me a letter?" Zacharias repeated with the irascibility of someone of restive temperament who does not immediately understand what is being said. "What for? What about? What are you talking about?"

"It's at the office. You can read it," Maury answered in a tone that had a puzzling, awkward quality.

"All right," Zacharias cried, as if not wishing to be bothered now, and rang off. What was Maury trying to tell

him—writing letters when he saw him every day? Probably looking for more money! That was the trouble when you got hold of a good man—he was never contented—wanted to get control of your whole business. He'd fix Maury for that tomorrow, throw a scare into him, perhaps; he was getting a swelled head and beginning to think himself indispensable, simply because he was.

But that did not matter now, and impatiently he dismissed the annoyance for the moment and hurried to pick up his hat. He caught a cab at the door and started downtown for the address he held in a crumpled wad in his fist.

Getting out when he reached it, Zacharias found himself in a thoroughly squalid neighbourhood. In such a section as this, he quickly calculated, rents were probably less than twenty dollars a month. He gazed contemptuously at a building not unlike the one in which he had passed his own childhood. It was embedded with grime and filth like a mine rich with ore. Going up the steps into a dingy entry-way, Alfred made out David Loewinthal's name on a bit of paper pasted on a tin mailbox.

Then he hesitated, trying to collect his faculties. It seemed unthinkable that Flora should be in such a place as this; nevertheless, he was quite sure that she was now somewhere inside this depressing building.

And at last he had to decide what he was going to say to her. He would first try to lie, of course. He would swear he had had absolutely nothing to do with David's arrest. But suppose she didn't believe him? And how was he going to talk to her in any case, with Loewinthal standing by and listening to everything? He would ask her to come outside for a moment, that was it. If he could only get her to himself, maybe he could make her see reason.

He set his shoulders jauntily to express a confidence he did not in the least feel. On the contrary he was dismayingly uncertain, almost frightened. Timidly he pressed the bell. Instantly the lock clattered rapidly in the door, and Alfred, with a constricted feeling in his throat, stepped into the

almost-dark hallway. The air was foul and stifling. Disappearing up into the gloom was an uncarpeted stairway. It creaked as he climbed it. On the landings he could make out piles of indistinguishable rubbish, as though these spaces were being used as nondescript storerooms. Striking a match as he arrived on the fourth floor, he peered at a door. Before he could decipher the name tacked upon it, it opened. It was Flora who opened it.

They blinked at each other for an instant of startled and inimical silence. Flora was evidently taken aback, as if she had flung the door open expecting someone else. And this, indeed, seemed the case as, after her first surprise, she now said at once grimly and calmly:

"Since I'm alone, you can come in."

Alfred walked into a big, scantily-furnished room that was evidently in much need of repairs. Cracks gaped in the plaster of the ceiling. A scrap of dirty rug covered part of the worn floor planks. The wallpaper was stained, and had apparently not been renewed for years. And this suggestion of a kind of hovel was increased by the rickety and seedy aspect of such furniture as occupied it.

"You'd better not sit down," Flora said in the same level tone. "You can stay here only a minute. So you'd better not waste time—just say whatever you've come to say——"

Alfred's brief confidence had leaked out of him. There was not any use even pretending to bluster. Something cold and controlled about her frightened him. For the first time she reminded him of Myra. He no longer thought of her as a beautiful automaton.

Aware that only a virile self-assertion could help him now, instead he contemptibly grovelled.

"Flora," he whimpered. "Don't talk to me like this—stop looking at me like you hated me or something! I'm your poppa—you can't forget that! It's because I love you I'm trying to protect you. I only want to bring you to your senses. Some day maybe you'll understand."

She made a gesture expressive of such vast disgust that it

even confused and halted Zacharias. Too late he began to grow angry. But she continued to stare at him not so much with hate as with incredulity.

"And to think I never knew anything about you at all before," she murmured bitterly. "Why, you're just a fake—a fake all through, aren't you? And yet you must have been good once—you must have even believed in something once! That was when Mother married you, I suppose. She found you out long ago. I always thought she was mean to you. But I don't think so any more!" She dropped her eyes. "There really isn't anything for either of us to say. You've seen me—and how things are—and you'd better leave."

"Not without you, I won't, Flora!" Zacharias cried wildly. "Just you come home with poppa now! I'll take care of you—I swear I won't never say one word about this ever again, not one word! You mustn't hang around his place any more—it ain't safe for you to do that, Flora!"

She stood regarding him with the same incredulous air. She was very quiet, and perfectly in command of herself. Her voice, too, with its educated intonations and clear pronunciation, seemed to make the idea of any kinship between them incongruous, since poor Zacharias in his agitation had fallen as always into the idioms and guttural accents of his youth. Almost, as they faced each other there, they suggested Myra and her own father, when Alfred had first known her.

At last Flora said in her cool, nearly emotionless tone:

"I certainly never thought you were stupid before. But you must be—if you can't understand even yet what I'm doing down here. David and I began living together from the moment I reached New York and got him out of the jail you put him in. I wanted to show him as soon as I could we weren't all alike."

For a moment Alfred desperately asserted to himself that she was lying simply to attack him as violently as she could. But that feeble hope, too, was instantly gone. Trying vainly to master himself, trying to stop the trembling now going on

throughout his entire body, Zacharias began nearly to scream at her in his sick rage.

"You'll see what happens to him for this!" he raved. "Seventeen years old you are only! Does he know that, the robber? Seventeen years old, and he knows what that means! This time he'll go to jail for keeps!"

The futility of a threat he would never be able to carry out left her unmoved, but her eyes held an almost exhausted look.

"Get out," she said in a low voice. "Just go. Do you mind?"

"With pleasure!" exclaimed Zacharias grotesquely. He stepped haughtily out into the corridor before he thought what he was doing.

Then, out in that dark hallway, with the door banged shut in his face, he came to his senses. He alternately pleaded and beat upon the door with his fists. There was no response. After quite a while he gave up and made his way slowly down the stairs, pausing every now and then to sob in shameless abandonment to his grief.

Even yet it was not very late; the theatres were only just disgorging their patrons. Some actors, who had finished work early, were already drifting into the theatrical club where Alfred squatted on a bar-stool trying to finish a whiskey. His face had a doltish look, like a man who has been clubbed into unconsciousness. Now and then he shook his head a little. He saw some of the members eyeing him. But it was not because they noticed anything wrong, or even odd, about him. They were only in awe of him, and envied him. Envied him! He kept upon his face a forbidding look. He could not bear talking to any of them, talking about things like the theatre. It was unjust that physical misfortune alone had the power to report itself. If he had been carried in here bleeding to death, what an uproar there would have been! And the misery he experienced now seemed far worse, yet no one guessed. How lonely a thing it was to be in trouble!

He told himself drearily he ought to eat something. He felt empty without being hungry. But he did not want to eat here. Someone was bound to come up to his table sooner or later. He gulped the rest of his drink hastily, went out to recover his hat from the rack, and started for the small, expensive steak house off Broadway that he usually frequented. It was a quiet place. He invariably dropped in there after late rehearsals. Once or twice after an opening, he had sat up all night in the place, waiting anxiously for the first newspaper notices.

He ordered a hot corned-beef sandwich and coffee. He munched the food slowly, his face puckered into a woebegone expression like a child who has been recently punished. He did not want to think about what had happened, and he had in a way ceased to think about it. It manifested itself only as a shapeless and indistinct mass of wretchedness like an ache.

He finished his coffee and looked vacantly around. He hated the thought of returning to his empty apartment. If there were only someone he wanted to see! Maybe he should find himself a girl. But such an idea seemed suddenly horrible. It would remind him of Flora in that sordid apartment with David Loewenthal. Hastily, he tore his thoughts away. He ran over the names of the people whom he considered his friends. The impossibility of breaking in at this hour of the night on somebody like I. J. Weisenthal or Bernard Samuels and pouring out his misery! He imagined how they would look at him if he tried.

He thought of Myra, now undoubtedly reading quite contentedly in her soft bed in the country, and what she would say if he returned there with his news. He had nowhere to go, nowhere! Then it occurred to him he might go to his office. There was much work to be done. He could get off some letters, picking them out on the typewriter with one finger. Perhaps he could forget his unhappiness that way.

He got up at once. At the same moment, near the cashier's desk, a young man also rose and idly sauntered over. He

then smiled with affected surprise, and greeted Zacharias warmly. He was an actor, of course. Zacharias remembered only his face. The young man had clearly got himself up with tremendous care. And in spite of his casualness, and his start of surprise, Zacharias knew perfectly well that he had come in here, dawdling, perhaps for hours, in the hope of just this one mere, reminding encounter.

His own desperation made Zacharias feel sympathetic for once. He longed, too, to taste his own power, which was all he had left. He nodded in a friendly way.

"Haven't seen you around for some time. Drop in the office one of these days when you're passing by. Might just be able to find something for you!"

The young actor could not even keep the elation out of his face. "I—I will!" he stammered. "Thanks! Thanks a lot, Mr. Zacharias!"

Alfred went mournfully out into the night. What a good fellow he really was, always being so kind to everyone!

The crowds were thinning on the streets as he walked toward his building. He woke up the Negro elevator operator, dozing on his stool over a tabloid newspaper.

"Warm night, Jim."

"Yes, sir! Yes, Mr. Zacharias!"

He let himself into his office. It comforted him a little with the numerous memories of triumphs it contained. Before sitting down he opened his medicine cupboard and hesitated for some time over a choice. Finally he dissolved a tablet in water, bore the paper cup to his desk. He looked ruefully at a pile of letters there. Did he really have to answer them? Did he really have to go on doing this forever?

Suddenly he recognized Maury's handwriting on a special-delivery letter on the top of the pile, and recollecting his earlier telephone conversation, he ripped it open curiously. Then his face grew still more haggard and aged.

Maury was leaving him! He was quitting him without a word of explanation after all these years! Of course it was this business of David Loewinthal that was at the bottom of

that also! Maury had found out all about that already. But Alfred had never imagined that Maury could desert him for any reason whatever. He had thought of him almost as if he were part of himself. Perhaps in a way he was fonder of him than of any man he knew.

"I'll get along without you all right!" he exclaimed savagely, but in his heart he knew it was not so, and that the loss was a severe loss.

But sadder even than the future difficulty this promised to bring, was the intensification of loneliness which the news produced. In all the world where he was so well known, so admired, a famous and rich man, he had no one, not a soul. Yes, no one cared about him in the least, no one was in the least interested whether he lived or died. Only some actors he was useful to, but they did not even like him. His wife had drawn utterly apart from him in her unfeeling indifference, in spite of all the luxuries he had lavished upon her. And now Flora, whom he had loved so much, was gone. Living with that man, the immoral girl of that man, letting that man hideously enjoy her!

No one, no one! Not a friend anywhere! Why, the last real friends he had made were those young men he had known when he, too, was a young man way back in the war—Will Giles and Adam Mallory and Julian Gamble. But he had long since lost touch with all of them, though, of course, he had heard of Julian and his escapades now and then, since who that read the newspapers could avoid hearing about them?

Zacharias suddenly and bitterly demanded: Why had that submarine ever come up? It would have been a far better thing if it had stayed on the bottom where it was that time, with him in it!

Reaching abruptly for the cup of medicine, his trembling hand knocked it over. In the ceaseless vexations which seemed to be plaguing him, he began to cry again. But this time he made no sound. The heavy forlorn tears rolled noiselessly down his grey cheeks.

About a self-pity so abject and so vast, there was, in the end, something inscrutably pitiful.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

IT COULD BE said of Mr. Solomon that he possessed a quality far more uncommon than is usually supposed: he did not look like himself. His body was so attenuated as to convey an effect of drooping, like a flower that has been too long in the heat; and his insectivorous eyes, immense, cavernous and almost suggesting sightlessness, by their indistinct blending of pupil and iris, lent to his repellent features a sombreness that was disturbing. Everything about him, indeed, seemed mournful, brooding, and formidably sadonic.

Nothing could have been more untrue. Beneath this exterior there was a spirit shyer than a young girl's, full of the utmost refinement and sensibility. Mr. Solomon, much as he regretted it, was entirely dominated by the most delicate perceptions of a kind heart. To its demands, in the face of reason, experience, and instinct, he invariably gave way with a groan.

This contradiction of sound sense and impractical tenderness filled him now as he stood anxiously on the curb of the Boston street. He peered with his enormous, short-sighted eyes at the corner as if to hurry toward him the man for whom he had already been waiting for nearly an hour and three-quarters. Fury filled Mr. Solomon's soul, together with a great sadness, for he was not really angry at anyone unless it was himself. For why, he quite hopelessly demanded of his temperament, should he be standing here like this, taking other people's burdens upon his own exhausted shoulders, attempting to compensate for their shortcomings with his own feeble capabilities, and generally suffering for them when he had already a sufficiency of miseries of his own?

Out of the tail of his eye he glanced nervously at the chauffeur of the big, seven-passenger car that was drawn up

at the gutter, and saw that the chauffeur was still chewing his gum with a kind of tough, hostile clamping of his jaws that conveyed everything—disparagement, contempt, impatience. How much longer would he consent to wait? Twice Mr. Solomon had gingerly approached him. Once it was with the offer of a cigar, which the chauffeur had tucked into his vest pocket carefully, while saying at the same time in a surly, quite unpropitiated snarl: "I can't stay here all day, you know!" The second time it was with an entreating smile and a few mumbled words that made an appeal to the simplest elements of human understanding. On that occasion, half an hour ago, the chauffeur had merely looked at him in silence, as if too scornful of such remarks even to bother answering them, and had chewed away more menacingly than ever on his gum.

Mr. Solomon teetered on his long legs like a drunken stork, and thrust his ugly, pitted neck farther from his collar in his effort to descry in the distance the man he longed to see; but among the people hurrying past, dodging vehicles as they criss-crossed the street, or bouncing around the corner as pointlessly as balls, there was not the slightest sign of him. What could possibly have happened? Had he run away? But no, men like that never run away. Had he had an accident? But men like that never had accidents either. Had he, in the most incredible explanation of all, actually forgotten? Probably not that either; he was simply maddeningly, inhumanly, taking his time.

With melancholy Mr. Solomon reviewed the circumstances that had set him here at this hour of the morning, baffled and distressed, with so much work of his own to be done, desperately worrying about someone whose affairs did not concern him in the least.

The old woman had had to go; indeed, he had known that for some time past. She constantly forgot things, failed to clear the halls of refuse in the paper bags and trash-baskets outside the doors, neglected to keep the hot-water system running. Or else she let the wrong people in, such as

mendicants and solicitors, or kept the right people out, such as dear friends of the tenants, demanding to wait in their apartments until they returned. Her mind was undoubtedly going rapidly, and her physical feebleness struck to the heart, reminding one insensibly that once she had actually been a young girl, quite fresh and amazingly, perhaps, even attractive. Boys of that era, who themselves were now old men, had in some dim dance-evening of long ago smelt out the figure beneath the tight bodice, and conceivably licked their lips and devoured her with zestful eyes. And she had been supple and strong and probably even a little sure of herself. But now it seemed even crueller to give the poor, wrinkled creature work than to deny it to her; it filled one with a shameful feeling of brutality. But how to get rid of her, that was the difficulty. For her tremulous anxiety to please, her innocent awe of Mr. Solomon's humble position as a harrassed collector for a third-rate real-estate corporation, brought the sweat out on his brow whenever he thought of telling her she was dismissed. In vain he reminded himself of his own precedent obligations to his employers, his duty to the querulous wife who bullied him, and to the two stringy little girls whose fearful future was in his timid hands. He simply could not do it, although the complaints steadily trickling in might end by causing him to lose his own job instead.

Then the music teacher on the second floor of this particular building had made the most unanswerable complaint of all, and Mr. Solomon, saying to himself that it was fate, stood aside half gratefully to let matters take their course. Someone else had taken the initiative; he would not be to blame. Of course, the tragic old woman had never stolen that meretricious locket; it would be easy to assure her that he, Mr. Solomon, was perfectly convinced of that, while explaining at the same time that he was also powerless to protect her. She could go, she would disappear, and someone else could henceforth do the worrying about her.

But when he explained all this to her, the nods and jerks

of her foolish head, her eager agreeing smiles as if to encourage him in his attack, made it very hard. It was plain that she had no protection of any kind against anyone. And then the next day, when everything had been settled and the whole thing was done, that wretched locket had had to turn up wedged down in the crevice of the music teacher's flimsy davenport; and Mr. Solomon found himself back in the same position as before, with the necessity of inventing still another pretext, and going through the painful scene all over again.

He was angry at her, unjustly yet naturally; and this was aggravated by a certain ominous curtness of one of his employers.

"Solomon, what the hell are you doing with 148? Who have you got in there, anyway? Tenant just called us up and said he was locked out last evening and had to spend all night on the doorstep. You oughtn't to have any trouble getting someone good to look after a building these days!"

And the voice said by implication that in this era depression, with thousands suddenly turned beggar, thousands more beseeching jobs, any job at all, there would be no difficulty in replacing Mr. Solomon also with "someone good."

Mr. Solomon, full of rage against himself, had called with that kind of resolve which first sweeps aside all foresight and all consequences. His indignant speech burst out of him in one piece, and when it was over, there remained, as usual, nothing but his kind heart. For the old woman once more idiotically and instantly agreed with him about the necessity for her going as if she thought so little of herself as to believe it was her duty to join the world in its disdain of her.

Weakly, Mr. Solomon had then asked her what she expected to do, had she any place to go, any place to live, any distant relatives who would take care of her? He was then astounded by the information in the midst of a number of confused, rambling utterances, punctuated by many painful jokes, to learn that she had a son.

A son! Moreover he was a doctor, she said. Probably she was lying about that. Still he was a son, a son who had abandoned his mother to this shameful and miserable condition, and in the same city as himself moreover. Mr. Solomon's outraged virtue stuck in his throat. He knew well there were many detestable people like that in the world. But he did not suppose they could be indifferent to their own hardness once they were clearly apprised of it. He decided immediately to interview this son, tell him plainly what was happening, and force him by the weapon of his own conscience to make amends. He might be a monster of cynicism, or a shattered drunkard or worse, but he would not have a chance: Mr. Solomon knew himself armed with the truth.

Then when he attempted to learn the address of this unconscionable man, the old woman had suddenly shut up as tight as a clam. She displayed a surprisingly unexpected amount of character, obstinacy, and cunning. Mr. Solomon explained, then wheedled, then finally became exasperated. Nothing was of the slightest use. He wondered wildly if she had invented the whole story. But no, his instinct told him that a son really existed. And she seemed to be defending him, protecting him crazily against her own interests, in the fear of causing him the slightest annoyance.

Mr. Solomon had retired defeated. He had given her until the end of the month to get out, and he knew perfectly well that she had no place in the world to go once she had left. The picture of her wandering out into those callous streets with the dreadful lack of any destination at all, haunted his sleep. He felt that he himself was doing this to her, and unless he found her son, he would never rest easy again.

The tug-of-war between them continued for another two weeks, Mr. Solomon fighting for his peace of mind against the burned-out old creature who seemed to be fighting just as hard for her own destruction. After each frustrated interview, Mr. Solomon would let several days elapse, hoping that time would be on his side and she would inevitably

come to her senses. But he never saw any change in a face that was indomitable upon this subject alone, and a kind of admiration mingled with his wrath and incredulity. He laid traps for her which she somehow saw through; he wasted time by developing with the greatest care simple and unanswerable arguments. She would smirk and nod in seeming agreement, and at the end be as determinedly mum as ever. It was clear that wild horses would not drag from her the whereabouts of her unspeakable son. Then, one day, Mr. Solomon decided he had had enough of this, and his frustration goaded him into the ultimate solution of violence.

Entering the place with a passkey on that afternoon, he had the good fortune to discover that he was alone; she was doubtless upstairs trying to clean a hall or blundering inefficiently through some similar task. Mr. Solomon went at once to the cheap, oak desk that stood in one corner of her dingy cellar bedroom, snapped the weak lock, and began with the panic of a thief to paw over the tangle of papers and obscure mementos it contained.

They were of many kinds, and seemed to have been preserved like fetishes. There were some old legal documents that appeared to be about the disposition of some farm or other. The dryness and yellowness of the paper, the faded ink, suggested that the matter they concerned had long since equally faded as a fact. There was a stiff dance program about the size of a golf score, with a small pencil attached to it by a pale blue ribbon. It was carefully divided into alternate waltzes and two-steps, with some illegible, pencilled names written in the space after each. There was a dog license, and the tin license plate from a car that carried a date of more than twenty years earlier. There were a number of snapshots, and a wooden-looking wedding picture done by a cheap photographer; Mr. Solomon in his hurry scarcely glanced at the faces. There was another professional photograph of a naked infant sprawling upon a rotund belly, its legs bent straight upward over its back, and a toothless smile projected vacantly into the vacant air. There was a printed

program of the "Moonlight Excursion" of the Timothy J. Daly Association, and finally a prescription blank that bore a doctor's name and address. It was her name, too. So he was a doctor, after all! But the same dryness and yellowness had crisped the paper, making a comment of certainty upon the vanishing of the address itself. Mr. Solomon reluctantly dropped it to emit at last a grunt of exultation as he unearthed, without having to search any further, something he could believe in with assurance.

This was a letter that bore a date of scarcely six weeks previous. It began:

Dear Mom:

If you've got it, will you give ten dollars to the bearer. We're doing all right, and everything looks fine if we can tide over a few more days until . . ."

Reading hurriedly, Mr. Solomon read no farther. "Dear Mom" was clue enough. He examined the address. It was a printed letterhead, bearing a strange name: "The Nu-Food Healthway Restaurant."

Apparently the son had written it from there, and doubtless the people who ran the place were likely to know him and his address. And Mr. Solomon had scarcely committed the number and street to his memory, when footsteps on the creaking stairs above told him that in another minute he was likely to be caught. He shut the desk as quickly and noiselessly as possible, and as though stricken by feelings of guilt, made his escape so wildly as to knock over a chair and go sprawling on his face. He heard a surprised voice call, and picking himself up with no time even to rub his bruises, hobbled desperately for the door, and so escaped into the street.

He had had many things to occupy him that day, half a dozen matters he had promised his employers to attend to faithfully; but now, in the impetus of his victory, they must wait. He hurried at once to the location of the restaurant on the letterhead.

It struck even Mr. Solomon as a singularly uninviting place. An elevated structure darkened the street overhead. Trucks rumbled over the unclean cobbles, and there was an aspect of sordidness and filth in the neighbourhood that at least defeated the appetite. But wedged between a junk shop and a repulsive tenement building, there the restaurant stood, the raised enamel letters on the window scarcely fly-specked as yet by time. Mr. Solomon entered diffidently, seeing no one at the dozen tables or so that stood in the small room. Of course it was early. Still, no one came to take a supposed order, and standing there uncertainly, he gradually grew aware of sounds in an open room just to the rear. A peaceful voice was deliberately expounding something while seeming to pay no attention to a curious accompaniment of low, indignant sobs.

Mr. Solomon advanced hesitantly, craning his long neck. He poked his head like an inquiring crane around the doorway of the other room, and saw three men seated there in cane chairs about a table that was solidly covered with books. Facing them was a stout, red-faced, middle-aged, foolish-looking woman who was emitting the noises of grief. The man speaking to her was middle-aged also. There was something emaciated about him, yet his blue eyes were remarkably untroubled. There was a compassionate sweetness about his unworldly expression.

His glance, gently rising, encompassed Mr. Solomon, and seemed to greet him and welcome him as though he surprisingly were a very old friend. A resemblance too remote to be explained by any defining of particulars, yet quite sharply certain, informed Mr. Solomon he had run his quarry down, and that here, indeed, was the poor old woman's son.

Rather bewilderedly he sat down, assured somehow that he was not considered in the least an interloper. He looked furtively around. He thought these were nearly the strangest people he had ever seen: the fat, greasy-looking individual with hands folded upon his stomach was actually going to

sleep in one corner; the intense, quivering young man across the room, gnawing at his nails in a kind of sickness over some private anxieties of his own; the bland, tranquil speaker; and the unabashedly sobbing woman.

She now, as if exhausted by her own repetitions, gathered her things together and asserted dismally:

"All I can say is, you've lost my money. And you told me—you told me——"

Another burst of sobs prevented the revelation of what she had been told, but Mr. Solomon; whose knowledge of practical life was extensive, had already divined quite accurately the principal facts and relationships in this argument of which he had become so oddly a witness as to seem almost a participant. The son, whom he now indubitably faced, was so unlike all his simple preconceptions that he could not immediately fit him into any logical category. But it was probable that he was actually the proprietor or manager of this disastrous-looking eating house with the forbidding name, and equally probable that the middle-aged woman was a sort of backer who had been gulled into an absurd investment. As for the others, they were plainly mysterious associates of some kind of the son, not of the wretched woman.

As if a session of many hours had torn her nerves and reduced her finally to hopelessness, she got up and made her way out with her handkerchief to her eyes, giving Mr. Solomon a glance of reproachful wonder on the way. He next discovered that he was being genially but not very curiously interrogated by the untroubled blue eyes of the man he had formerly supposed could only be an intolerable brute. Whatever he might be, he was certainly not that.

Mr. Solomon explained hoarsely and awkwardly why he was here, conscious that his shabby listener was looking at him with a kind of tender indifference, so that he was bedevilled by a feeling of merely talking to himself; and when he was through, this feeling was endorsed by a statement so wild that he could only gape.

"Are you in Pisces or Gemini? Anyway, a dual nature, always in conflict, I'm afraid. Now if you was on the seventh plane, which I am, you would see everyone must work things out for themselves. Sometimes I fall away myself, because we Sagitarians are very old . . . the oldest and the tireddest of all . . . we're ready almost to return. There's a very interesting book here on the subject——"

Mr. Solomon, in astonished silence, watched him fumbling on the table for several moments. Then he burst out:

"But what are you going to do about your mother? I tell you something's got to be done right away! That's what I came to see you about."

The other man looked up at him with his amiable, dim expression. He began to speak again in his unsettling way that made Mr. Solomon feel he himself was going crazy. He listened dumbly and tried hard to comprehend—something bewildering about nothing existing—and a number of words and phrases as unfamiliar as a foreign language.

It dawned upon him that the man was perfectly sincere, and in some queer way quite kind. Why, he was even pathetically likable! But he seemed to have no remorse for the position in which he had left his mother, almost as if he had no understanding of it.

Soon Mr. Solomon was able to piece nearly everything together. Without ever receiving a direct answer, he learned that the son had actually been a doctor of medicine once. But now he did not practise any longer. And he was certainly destitute, and in the most dire financial condition possible. Everything about the abandoned restaurant spoke tonguelessly but clearly of its complete failure. Probably no bills had been paid for some time. Its proprietor looked half starved.

While this interview, that never seemed to come down to earth for a minute, continued, Mr. Solomon was now and then aware of the eyes of the other two men resting upon him critically and unfavourably. Still, there was indifference

in them, too. It was like being watched by two dying animals.

In vain he pleaded again and again for some suggestion to follow on behalf of the broken old woman. In vain he brought forward practical suggestions himself. These were dismissed with such genial and honest pity that Mr. Solomon even began to doubt his own common sense. He listened blankly to the assertion that all such ideas were simply the result of his being on that unfortunately lower plane in which mere actions are performed. Only by contemplation and nonresistance to external happenings was anything actually to be achieved.

"But she'll starve!" he cried confusedly. "Where is she gone to go to? Since you got no place yourself, and no money, what are we gone to do?"

The son seemed to disdain answering anything so childish. In the face of reason, Mr. Solomon's own conviction was shaken, and he was handicapped, moreover, by his fundamental lack of education. He was vaguely fearful of anything which he could not understand, yet which presented itself in an intellectual guise. He tried to reassure himself by the private declaration that the man he was talking to was unbalanced, but somehow it would not go down. For he seemed so calm, so certain of himself, and so plainly without any intimations of competitiveness or guile. Mr. Solomon began miserably to wonder whether it was really he who was ignorant and stupid.

But the fact that nothing of any-kind was going to be done unless he himself did it became clearer and clearer. He would, furthermore, have to do it entirely alone. This pauper, this madman, was of not the slightest use, even as an adviser. Why, he did not even seem to be interested! With a low groan Mr. Solomon perceived that he had been elected, having a vision of the dreary and laborious task ahead of him for which there would not even be the poor reward of gratitude, or the pretence of thanks.

He collected his faculties with a violent effort. Getting

up as though released by a spring, he exclaimed to the wall in a determined yet melancholy voice:

"I'll do what I can. I see what's got to be done all right. And someone's got to do it."

The son beamed at him tenderly, but shook his head. "No, no one has to do nothing. You'll find it all here in this book. I'm going to give you a copy. If you'll study it now, you'll find out just like I said. It was dictated to a disciple—the Yogi-Venanda—by the Ascended Master Jacobus. I guess it's the greatest book ever written."

Mr. Solomon, once outside, threw the book violently from him into the gutter. Then, being a careful man, he picked it up remorsefully and smoothed the covers. But halfway down the block he changed his mind again, and this time poked it fiercely into an ash barrel. His long, horselike face wore an expression of profound woe.

After that, in the tormented longing to be quit of a burden that no one was going to remove from his shoulders except himself, Mr. Solomon had acted with energy. He saw at once there was only one thing to do. The old woman would have to be admitted to some philanthropic institution that handled cases like hers. No other recourse was possible. And first it was necessary to convince people of something that was altogether obvious yet was strangely difficult: that her son was so abysmally incompetent and in such straits himself as nearly to require institutional guardianship also. Mr. Solomon was then reassured of his sanity by his own shrewdness and his painstaking overcoming of many obstacles. First he had had to soothe the mother, trembling with rage at what he had done. After that he had seen lawyers, had had documents signed, submitted to insults, wasted much time and some money in trips and interviews. He was at first informed with cold suspicion of his purposes that no Jewish people were accepted by the institution, and had great difficulty in making it believed that his application was on behalf of an undoubted Gentile and was of no

personal advantage to him. For he could not convincingly explain his own participation in the matter. Yet he triumphed in the end, for the simple reason that he had to. His subsequent interviews with the old woman's son in the restaurant that was now closing its doors—Mr. Solomon had eaten one surprising meal there and then could readily understand why—never achieved anything except a horrible feeling of uncertainty that shattered every cheerful commonplace by which he lived. He came to believe that only by the disposal of the mother could he ever hope to escape the worse burden of the son. And ceaselessly, yet without rancour, he dreamed of the hour in which he would not have to see him any more. Such a man would soon drive him crazy.

It had all been arranged finally. The old woman herself had been calmed into acceptance; the son had signed affidavits with an air that said he was willing to sign anything; various exacting details had been settled, and the moment had struck. That was why the chauffeur in the big car was waiting outside now. That was why Mr. Solomon, too, was waiting. And still the son, who alone should have been really concerned, had failed to put in his appearance, as if this occasion, which had in it a violent sundering like death, did not matter in the least.

Mr. Solomon, standing mournfully, wondering if indeed his strength would last out the extraordinarily wasted and beaten feelings that possessed him, jumped around at the abrupt sound of the chauffeur's angry voice.

"Say, listen you! I can't wait here all day! I got two other calls to make. You just tell her to step on it, see. I've given you all the time I'm goin' to."

"But look," Mr. Solomon tremulously pleaded to the last, with a lost sense that the chauffeur was perfectly right, "it's only a few moments for you now—but for him—for her—it's everything! Honest, if it was your own mother, you'd feel like I say. You'd see then——"

"Don't you think I seen plenty in this job? Why, all these damned old scalawags want to do is eat! Get away with

murder, if you let 'em! Hell! You've been reading books or something! Now you just go and get her—and right now!"

Mr. Solomon, desperately casting around still for some final break, burst instead into a cry of exultation. He pointed excitedly.

"There he is! He's coming now. I knew he'd be here!"

Across the street at the far corner there had indeed appeared the man whom he had been waiting for with such insufferable tension. He was with someone, the young, nervous companion whom Mr. Solomon remembered on the occasion of his first visit to the restaurant. They were evidently about to part at the corner. Yet they seemed in no hurry about this, but appeared to be engaged in some argument or discussion or other. The son's carriage conveyed a sense of the deepest leisure. He could be seen to nod, then slowly shake his head. A smile might be imagined on his gentle mouth. He was going, he was leaving, he took a few steps away, then slowly returned for further argument. Mr. Solomon wet his lips and groaned.

"Gor God's sake," he mumbled helplessly like a man uttering a warning to the inanimate, "why don't you come along? What's the matter with you!"

The discussion at the corner went on peacefully, broken by still two further false alarms. Then at last, with the same lack of hurry, the parting was completed, and the man about whom Mr. Solomon's feelings were too sick for speech, sauntered gently towards him. He smiled with his remarkable sweetness. He made no explanation or even comment upon his intolerable lateness. But murmuring a greeting, and taking in the chauffeur, too, with his remote, yet friendly glance, Will Giles stepped down in the areaway to say good-bye to his mother.

Mr. Solomon, out of tact, forbore to be present at a scene of such intimate pain.

Mrs. Giles had long since been packed, her belongings crowded into three disreputable-looking suitcases. In a world

in which acquisition is the symbol of triumph, these three bags that bulged with worthless and tawdry trash made a satiric comment on a struggle that had endured for nearly seventy years.

And yet even now there was something bird-like and bright about Mrs. Giles. She still looked as if at any moment she might burst into chirping song. There was an incongruous lack of dignity about her in relation to her age. A youthful hat she had rescued from an ash barrel, and which was shockingly unsuitable, was perched on her head like a mocking challenge to all sense. Her undiminished enthusiasm lent a kind of horror to her position.

"Will, did you see the picture? Mr. Solomon got it for me—such a nice man! Why, just look now—see for yourself if it isn't an elegant place!"

Rather solemnly Will examined the photograph she handed him. It was that of a large private house guarded by scrollwork gates and with the marble columns and pretentious façade of another era, but it had evidently been adapted for institutional purposes. Beneath the picture was printed a caption: "The Amanda S. Stryker Home for Elderly and Indigent Females."

Giles handed it back without comment. Mrs. Giles uttered a sound surprisingly like a giggle.

"I'll wake them up!" she exclaimed. "You wait and see! Show 'em a thing or two!" She dove into a battered handbag and produced something, a kind of top, partitioned into marked and numbered divisions. "See, I'm all prepared!"

Giles smiled as if at the vagaries of a child, but only answered:

"Are you all ready, Mom? I'll take your bags out."

They emerged into the street together. The chauffeur instantly started his engine, and Mrs. Giles and her property began to be stowed away inside. Mr. Solomon stood by, looking on stupidly. He was surprised to realize he felt nothing at all, neither pleasure that the ordeal was ended finally, nor sympathetic regret that it must end thus dis-

mally. It was as if all his emotions had been drained out of him some time previously. He felt curiously blank as though he were dreaming not only of the existences of others, but of his own, too.

Mrs. Giles, seated at last in the car, peered through the open window. The chauffeur let his gear in, but for a moment, from some remote sense of courtesy, held back the clutch. Mrs. Giles' face was all at once quite frantic. It trembled. For an instant it looked as if she might embarrassingly and horribly cry.

She was, indeed, altogether distressed. For the first time it had dawned upon her that by this act she was abandoning Will to all the follies of masculinity. A thousand grotesque fears leaped into her disordered old head: she wanted passionately to plead with him not to forget to wear his rubbers whenever it rained; many things like that. But she saw his face with its pure calm unshaken, and knew that the only favour she could do him now was to leave him so, to leave him unannoyed and undisturbed. A frantic effort of bravery, that took all the strength of her age, passed through her. Her withered features under the flowered, young hat changed into the semblance of a ghastly smile. Jauntiness tried to express itself in the set of her broken shoulders. She leaned forward, and found recourse in the only armour with which she had ever resisted life, making now a last grotesque joke: "Over the hills to the bughouse!" she cried.

As if at a signal the chauffeur released his clutch and the car slid away, Mrs. Giles still waving rapidly from the window, her face still wearing a broad and cocky grin.

Giles stood watching gravely. He seemed very peaceful there, almost happy, one would have said. He had the tranquillity about him that is sometimes seen on a dead face after a life of much suffering. Then turning to Mr. Solomon at his side, he asked mildly if he had finished that book yet, the one that contained the wisdom of the Ascended Master Jacobus.

Mr. Solomon's emotions galvanically returned to him. His

throat bulged and collapsed almost like the throat of a frog. He could not immediately speak. He only knew at this moment that he did not want to live any more. Then some words came thick, stumbling and angry from him:

"I'm busy! I got a lot of things I got to do. Good-bye!"

He turned and plodded away, walking with his head bent, his body tense, rather like a man who is conscious of the possibility of being shot in the back.

Will Giles merely watched him disappear with his unaltered, compassionate air. He at once sighed and smiled. Then he, too, started off. But halfway down the block he paused, vaguely considering. He turned and began to walk in exactly the opposite direction. But it was impossible to say what the change of decisions was about. For his leisurely, ambling gait announced plainly that he was without a destination, or any purpose whatsoever.

CHAPTER FORTY

THE SMALL STEAMER glided at reduced speed up the harbour. Around her finicky progress there swirled and darted the prodigious traffic of the roadstead. Ferryboats thundered by upon oblique courses with their look of bullheaded determination. Rusting tramps sat lonely at their anchorages with the dejected aspect of ruined cars dumped in a junk yard. Barges, bearing squat loads of lumber and brick, virtuously obeyed frenetic little tugs which conveyed the fussy vitality to be found in undersized men. A shining fireboat, slick as a toy, crossed the bow of a dirty fishing schooner, like a woman of fashion ignoring the existence of a slut. And through all this churning activity the incoming steamer continued to make steadily and cautiously for her pier.

Below decks a few procrastinating travellers were still occupied in completing their last-minute packing. The bar had been closed; it looked like a coffin in the gloom of the

creaking smoking room. Most of the passengers were gathered in clumps on the forward decks peering towards the advancing New York skyline. The slender white buildings, grouped in a delicate profusion, suggested as always some fanciful illustration in a child's fairytale book.

The passengers stared there now as if they had never really seen this sight before. Their eyes were wondering. They wore grateful looks and were mostly solemn. Perhaps what they chiefly felt was relief, for they were not only returning home, they were returning to safety. All their passports had been taken away during quarantine, and none would this time be returned. On the next occasion that this steamer sailed there would be no ordinary pleasure travellers aboard. Her plates would carry streaks of camouflage, or else be painted that forbidding dun colour which is nearly rejected by Nature in its dead tonelessness.

For two weeks ago the Germans had marched into Poland, ignoring the English threat if this should happen; and so war had come once more upon the earth.

On the incoming steamer this morning, which had just left those shores where the new war had broken out, there stood, among the other passengers now crowded together on the forward deck, Adam Mallory.

He was glad to be out of Europe. It had not been a good trip. A profound sense of enervation, a listless acceptance of despair, had seeped up everywhere. For everyone knew war was coming, and in spite of the laboured manifestations of ease, the Continent lay there like a patient on a wheel table outside an operating room, waiting for an operation from which the chances are he may not recover. In the distress of this inevitable catastrophe, in an unendurable suspense as to the hour when it would strike, there was almost a kind of tormented longing every place to have it over and done with as soon as possible.

But glad as he was to be away from it, Adam was unfortunately depressed also at the prospect of his home-coming. Somehow the advancing war seemed to have brought

his own, small private dissatisfaction, his self-repudiation, to a head. He was sickened by his entire polite compromise with the world, and looked with repugnance upon his return to Marathon.

Self-doubt had never assailed him as disastrously as now. It was at last a doubt even of his own doubting. Others believed who were not only admired and eminent, but of whom it was sheer bigotry to say they were not sincere. He thought of those popular preachers who had scored great successes in the teeth of an era that contradicted their findings.

There was Wilmot Foster Bentinck, with his well-backed church, all liberal views and explosive optimism; there was Dr. Simon Ryder, whose sad and noble-seeming face attracted great throngs; there was Bishop Anson Verreker, who held fast hold to the esteem of one of the most influential congregations in the country.

Adam wondered how these men had invested themselves with such secure piety. He had never heard any of them; perhaps he had shut himself in too closely for his own good. All at once it occurred to him that he would like to attend the services of one of these remarkable divines in the hope of discovering the secret of their unshattered faith.

He reflected rapidly; today was Saturday; he had no need, and certainly no desire, to reach Marathon on Sunday; indeed, he was not even expected until early next week. Why shouldn't he stay in New York at least overnight in some quiet hotel, and tomorrow go to church as a member of a congregation for once? If so, whom ought he to hear? Why not Wilmot Foster Bentinck? He perhaps was the most intelligent of all of them, and at the same time not the least convinced of them.

The church was considered to be very beautiful; perhaps it was. A turquoise light romantically suffused the ample interior, where ushers, of the most elegant appearance imaginable, walked like cats, with faces that managed at

once to suggest infinite tenderness coupled with dignified awe.

Adam could not help but take a somewhat cool professional interest in the business that was now going forward. He watched expressionlessly, yet carefully, like an actor studying and cataloguing the tricks of yet another actor whose performance he has dropped in to see.

He had to admit everything was being done with perfection; and all this flawless, soothing atmosphere must have been achieved only by taking the greatest pains. He listened peacefully to the opening hymn and the creed and the short prayer, earnestly and even hopefully examining Wilmot Foster Bentinck meanwhile.

Bentinck was undistinguished enough, but he was clearly and attractively honest all the way down to that level below which he probably could not penetrate. And he had, moreover, the energy, the enormous vitality, without which no career in public life is possible. It flowed out of Bentinck certainly in warm waves, making everyone feel healthier and stronger for it. He was a man who obviously had the rarest of gifts: an actual, and so unshakable, conviction. That was why all these others were here, eager to be in the comforting presence of someone who was neither a fool nor insane, yet who passionately believed that human life was of the greatest significance.

The collection was taken, and Bentinck began his sermon. This, which was announced on a large placard outside the church, had a provocative title: "The Real Day of Judgment."

Bentinck began to show his direction as he enlarged his theme. The Day of Judgment was every day, it was this day, and the Judge was simply the conscience of every man. Full of similar figures, the sermon rolled on under its own momentum like a heavy vehicle rattling down a hill. Adam knew at once with dejection that it had been useless for him to come.

Yet for a while he tried to listen intently, though in the

act of trying, his thoughts perversely jumped away. His attention roved vaguely over such faces of the big congregation as came within his range. They were all, of course, respectable people—people who lived the humdrum, patient lives, who married and brought up children whom they advised to imitate them, people who concerned themselves about the State, who fretted themselves with troubled thoughts about good deeds, kind words, and honourable behaviour. But beneath their little show of assurance, how tense and strained all their faces showed! How poorly concealed were the miseries and confusions they had been subjected to, how plain was their cognizance of the blank, sardonic advance of death which they now so pitiably denied!

The Day of Judgment for them—the *real* Day of Judgment—what would such a spectacle actually be like were it to occur in the old orthodox sense? For a moment again he frowned in a self-commanded attention at Wilmot Bentinck, but immediately his thoughts jumped back to the fancy that had possessed him. He was filled only with a sad calm, and now he no longer pretended to listen, but instead began to entertain himself deliberately with his own imaginings.

He saw the earth suddenly spread out mile after unceasing mile, and all the graves everywhere struck open, and the seas bursting, and, jolted rudely upright, the billions of beings who had died already, and the billions and billions who as yet had not even been born.

In the variety of their costumes, and the multi-hued stuffs in which they were arrayed, they spread over the earth like a meadow of bright flowers. In ruffs, furbelows, and glistening top hats, in doublets, cutaways, armour, untanned skins, and painted nakedness, they stared at the white sky.

There were so very many of them that not even a blade of grass could any longer be seen, and in the whole of the

Sahara not so much as a grain of sand. They choked the plains, the jungles, and covered the mountain peaks. The sites of dead cities were dense and black with them. On the now ominously quiet surfaces of the oceans there floated the countless numbers that had been drowned in these. Even the people who had been destroyed by earthquakes, volcanoes, and avalanches, or had been devoured by wild beasts, or had been crisped or exploded into nothingness as tracelessly as gasses, the dust had now whirled together to make anew for their brief moment.

And in this multi-billion horde there could be seen everywhere all those who had in any way been picked out from the average rest either by the accident of inheritance, or of propitious circumstances, or of unique attainments.

All the saints of all the ages were there, all the prophets, seers, martyrs, priests, devil-dancers, the makers of spells and incantations, the inventors of ten thousand thousand divinities, and the innumerable claimants to divinity themselves.

It was clear that a great number of these were mad, while the faces of even the most cunning and avaricious expressed only a drugged bewilderment and despair. There were at least seventeen thoroughly wretched-looking Buddhas, and half as many Messiahs. There were black savages with monstrous headdresses, having their entire bodies painted vermilion with menacing ju-jus. There were priests of the sun and of the moon; countless other holy men. Ignatius Loyola was there, like a man forever carrying bound to his heart a burning stake; Rudolph Steiner with tormented eyes; General William Booth with a tambourine, Mohammed with a scimitar, and Bishop Atterbury in a wig; Zoroaster, Emmanuel Swedenborg and Calvin; Martin Luther, Madame Blavatsky and Thomas Torquemada, the torturer, who, it could now be seen, had tortured himself most of all; and millions more as varied, as lost, and as pitiable. Even Cousin Daniel was there.

Those few who had escaped death by violent cruelties

had clearly not escaped the ordinary disasters of life. That look was in their eyes.

And this same look could be noticed as clearly on the faces of the even greater multitude who had once been kings on earth: all the sultans, emperors, satraps, beys, sobranies, nyzams, immans, shahs, ptolomies, emirs, princes, tyrants and caliphs who now stared up with haggard eyes into the pitiless blank sky. They, too, had suffered bitterly.

More incalculable still were the numbers of those who had once been formidable on earth as warriors and heroes. The Duke of Marlborough was here, Prince Eugene, Garibaldi, and a tired old man called Ulysses; Don John of Austria in golden armour crusted with jewels from which the vain, weak, petulant head protruded; Francis Drake and Henry Morgan; Admiral Benbow and Wellington; Caesar, mournful and spent; and Sir Philip Sidney, recalling with shame now the insufferable snobbery with which he had offered the cup of water to the dying soldier and thus reminded him, even in that hour, of the enormous gulf he supposed existed between them.

The luckless Duke of Medina-Sidonia could be discovered also, once Admiral of the Great Armada; and General Grant, whose last desperate struggle had been the grinding compilation of his dull memoirs, set down for money as the cancer thickened in his throat; Hannibal, remembering Carthage; Washington, struggling even now to clamp together those wretched false teeth which were popped apart by their spring the moment he relaxed his weary jaws; Marmont, Murat and Ney, knowing with sick apprehension that God was not Napoleon after all, for Napoleon was here, too, as sick as they; and ten times ten million others, past and future, from the leader of the first yelling sortie of a dozen brutes from a Neolithic cave to the director of the final armaments of the world against the peopled stars.

So it was that from such desperate seekers of private power and glory, the eye roved in search of the lonely spirits whose aims had been purer, almost selfless; all the thinkers,

philosophers, and scientists, the men who had desired to aid humanity, not use it and prey upon it to secure their own ends.

There they were, a mighty company likewise, and for the most part shabby and seedy, and often with heads of so odd a shape as even to alarm one another. Here were bemused philosophers who had argued with the abstract gods they themselves had created for this especial purpose, and men who had explained everything except why it was they remained distressed after the explanation, and men who held to the principle that pure reason alone is pure.

There were many astronomers, chemists, economists, biologists, physicians, and mathematicians among them, men like Plato, Epicurus and Kant; Hegel, Newton and Spinoza; Copernicus, Galileo and Archimedes; Aristotle and Leibnitz; and uncountable others.

But all these severer persons, so uncompromising in their rectitude, appeared to have escaped no more than the kings and warriors, the saints and demigods. Nor was it alone that they had so often been compelled to face want, indifference, contempt and occasionally even disgrace and death for blasphemy, since the gods of each successive era seemed to have been endowed always by man with an unalterable repugnance to education; it was also that they themselves had seldom escaped the inner, insistent voice of the saddest sort of futility; nor had all their devotion to honourable effort spared them in the least from the ordinary pangs, griefs, and sufferings of existence.

Was it possible, perhaps, that in this holocaust of anguish, one huge aggregation had somehow escaped—the artists, the creators, the believers in the importance of imitation; all those who had attempted to arrest time in fixed moments?

Alas, they were as distraught as the others, this once vain, disreputable, numberless race: the musicians, clowns, sculptors, ballet dancers, painters, story tellers, poets, singers, jugglers, satirists, magicians, and actors.

In incongruous clumps could be seen Sir Arthur Sullivan

and Bach, Ethelbert Nevin and Handel, Victor Herbert and Mozart. Stradivarius, who had been clutching a fiddle which he had meant to present as a gift to the Lord God, had already dropped it in despair from his shaking fingers.

Intermingled with these, the hordes of painters and sculptors could be discerned, the figures of Franz Hals and Murillo; Holbein and Raphael; Watteau, Leonardo, Velasquez; the Japanese family named Kano; Gainsborough, El Greco, and Breughel; and numberless Greeks; Assyrians; the scratchers of mammoths on the walls of pre-Adamite caves; old ladies who had successfully painted bright yellow cows in green summer fields; innovators who had tried to enlarge the eye of the body with the eye of the mind.

Then after these might be noticed in turn the multitudes of all who had struggled to assemble their thoughts and fancies into a simulacrum of life, who had poured out poems, plays, stories, sagas, chronicles, and even ludicrously grave accounts of themselves.

A great many of them, it could be seen, were quite as insane as the more disordered of the seers and prophets. A great many others seemed to have affected insanity in the hope of securing immunity from various forms of responsibilities. And there was, obviously, something troubled or tormented about them all.

Thus could be noted William Blake, beaming fatuously above the ache of an empty belly; Poe, unable to endure his overwhelming selfrecognition; Dostoevsky, tense and quiet with the sorrowful anticipation of the epileptic; DeQuincey and Coleridge, and a hundred thousand similar others.

All the standard authors were there as well: Walter Scott and Browning, Dickens and Stevenson, Tennyson and Wordsworth, Victor Hugo and Thackeray.

Then there were a number of hearty spirits, or those trying to seem so for one reason or another: George Borrow, Ben Jonson, and Captain Marryat; Congreve, in a decent slashed coat sat by, with the fixed insolent stare which he trusted was the aspect of a gentleman; and Sir George

Etherege with a fine, humorous, blotched face of well-bred dissipation, just as he had looked that night when he had broken his neck lighting his drunken guests out from the little dinner in which he had celebrated his Ambassadorship to Pomerania.

There were many, many others: a sad little Jew named Heine; some Irishmen named Sheridan, Sterne, and Steele who shared equally the determination to appear the victims of their own excessive good nature; George Byron, sickened by those tricks that so easily won fools; Dr. Johnson glumly recalling those eleven weary years on the dictionary which no one remembered any more, so that all that toil seemed to have been about nothing except the curt letter he had scrawled off to Chesterfield one morning in twenty minutes; Bertrand de Born with a lute on his lap against his paunch, and his ribald look, all malice and despair; Voltaire and Count Tolstoy; Karl Baedeker, a solid, practical man, wondering whether, perhaps, there might not be a demand for guidebooks in Hell; Li Po and Francis Bacon: lop-handed Cervantes, of the melancholy visage; and Samuel Clemens, sardonically silent; Macchiavelli, reassuring himself with the thought that God might be many things but surely neither a fool nor a liar; Stendhal, and Emily and Charlotte Brontë, and incalculably many others.

But not one of these had escaped either.

As for the lesser kinds of artists, such as actors, most of them were trying to act even now: Bernhardt, throwing her long head back on the stalk of her throat; Booth delivering a stare of vacuous profundity; and all the others, men and women, the comedians, impersonators, heroes, and tragediennes, now whitely faced the sky in a dismal expectation of the gigantic boo which should presently terminate this short, final performance.

But among all of these various groups who had achieved the doubtful advantage of being remembered, to say nothing of countless other minor divisions such as popular criminals, acrobats, explorers, inventors, and statesmen, there were

very few women who had bothered to attain celebrity.

Outside of a few queens, who had had this thrust upon them, there were thus comparatively meagre groups of female saints, female artists, and the like. Those who were recalled seemed to have been so chiefly in connection with love: women like Cleopatra, who had managed to represent an entire people in her embrace; or Lady Hamilton similarly; or Nelly Gwynn, the jolly, plump girl whom no one had ever wanted to see starve; or Lily Langtry; or Fatima, that one daughter of Mohammed; or poor, foolish Flora MacDonald; or Josephine de Beauharnais. And it was strange to notice how many of these, as well as the mistresses of kings like the Pompadour, were invariably the most unbeautiful of women, but very nearly the cleverest.

Yet all of these, too, like the men who so outnumbered them, seemed distraught.

Thus in the end the eye might have turned in wonder towards all those who had instead lived and died in obscurity, who had performed no deeds, good or bad, that had been thought even worth recording: the multitudes of perfectly ordinary men and women of all eras, whose astronomical quantities no imagination could possibly contain.

All it was possible to say of any of them was that they had been born, had bred, and presently had died. So perhaps the only way they could be classified at all was by the distinctive sufferings they had respectively undergone.

By such a method they could be grouped into rough and casual divisions like the eleven-odd billion mothers who had had the experience of having their babies bayoneted in their arms; the more than twenty billion innocent men who, burned, boiled, hanged, shot, dismembered, and ingeniously tortured, had been executed by mistake; the thirty billion who had been sacrificed in religious ceremonies; and all the aggregates, that were beyond any reckoning, of unhappy and frantic suicides, of the blind, the deaf, and the mute; of defectives, mongoloids, cretins and witches; of the infinite

varieties of cripples; of the occupants of dungeon cells, and of all those tortured by lifelong ailments.

It was only too plain that none had anywhere escaped, the obscure no more than the eminent. All here had experienced humiliations, injustice, the satire of accidents, the anguish of bereavements, and the universal terror of their own deaths in turn.

Yet all felt guilty, all blamed themselves. Though in their lifetimes they had been betrayed, trapped, and injured in countless fashions, they knew well that they had paid others in exactly the same coin.

Thus they now neither expected any mercy nor supposed themselves deserving of any. Stripped of the last illusions, each licked his uneasy lips as he recognized the evil in his own heart. For their sufferings, it was at last clear to them, had sprung entirely from the evil in their own hearts.

So, as they now tensely waited, their thoughts fled back not to their miseries but only to their poor little wickednesses and mistakes.

That was why a kind of constant movement and anxious rustling was going on through the entire assemblage. And all now recognized that it did not really matter what special god they had previously invented for themselves. Even the formerly most earnestly convinced were anxious and uncertain. The Judge of their crimes and follies that they must presently confront would certainly not prove to be the Fish-God of one ancient people, nor the Cat-God of another, nor yet the triple-headed God of another. Nor was He the Sun. Nor was he God, the Father. Being unimaginable, He had been imagined by no man. They were sure only that He was implacable.

So, whatever His aspect, they did not know what else to do now except to attempt still to propitiate a force which had already vented such dire punishments upon them. Many of the holy men and the saints were hurriedly unrolling the robes that covered the stigmata of their martyrdoms, like so many beggars at the arrival of tourists. Most of them, too,

were mumbling over strings of beads, or beating little bells, or burnings wisps of scented paper. The kings, their fingers nervously fumbling at their crowns, were making ready in hasty droves for grovelling abdications; the frightened warriors were struggling to release their swords from their scabbards to present them in unconditional surrender; the men of thought were humbly gathering together the feeble offertory of their endeavours; the artists of all kinds were preparing to catch a flattering likeness, or strike up a laudatory song; even the actors were thinking of effective entrances or exits, by which they might perhaps win some faint degree of amelioration. As for the others, the uncelebrated, they had now not even the poor little shabby possessions they had valued so solemnly on earth, and had nothing to offer except their continued illimitable capacity for suffering, and the humble surrender of themselves to fresh punishments.

Now the last tombstone had been rolled back, the last sea had sent to the surface the last of its dead, and there fell upon the cosmos a stillness more terrifying than anything ever before known. All over the earth it was as though the very stones and trees were rapt in a dreadful attention.

Then the vast bowl of the sky began to seethe with colours. They revolved and trembled in spirals of ecstasy. Suddenly formlessness became form. Upon these shattered and wretched creatures that He had sent forth into existence by a wave of thought, He cast His summarizing vision. And there moved through the contemplative quiet something that could not be perceived, but only felt, the vibration of some emotion that was not the simple compassion, which was the best that even the most optimistic had dared hope for, but something larger still: a wild, impalpable contrition.

In that awful hush, while not one breath disturbed the arrested air, the judgment was at last pronounced. In a language that was ten thousand times ten thousand languages, and yet was soundless, He spoke:

"FORGIVE ME!"

As Adam walked back to his hotel from the church through the crisp Autumn air, he felt extraordinarily peaceful.

In the pleasant weather, many other people were out, walking about, or perhaps, even in New York, returning from churches, like himself. There seemed to be nothing noticeably evil about them, or noticeably pitiable. They looked, on the whole, cheerful, as though grateful to be alive. They were not bothering their heads at all about last judgments, but were sustained instead by a thousand amiable illusions and expectations, which neither all the warnings of philosophers nor their own familiar observations had ever disturbed in the least.

As he strode along, his deep tranquillity even increased. He cast from his mind forever all further acceptances of, and revolts against, the beliefs in God, immortality and the soul. For these things could surely never be anything more than speculative. No one knew. No one had ever proved anything except his own hope or his own despair. And since it was so plainly impossible ever to be certain of the common fate, was it not unseemly to demand immediate cognizance like a spoiled child? Everyone would find out for himself sooner or later. One had merely to wait.

Meanwhile it was surely more decent, more dignified, and more self-respecting to wait calmly, to accept without protest the limitations of having been born a human animal, and to cease the probing and whimpering after answers to which a creature with such limitations was certainly not entitled.

And this agnosticism, burned free of all the emotion which gnostics always required to bolster up their affirmations, had led him to the final step he was going to take now.

He was going to take now? He stopped abruptly, conscious of, yet indifferent to, the puzzled stares of several passers-by. He was altogether startled, not by the idea itself of what he suddenly intended, but by his unexpected realization of it. It was as though, all unknowing, he had been resolving it for a long, long time.

What had brought about this quiet revelation? Was it simply the slow dropping of time into the scale, until one final molecule had sent the balance swinging up? Perhaps Bentinck's unimaginative sermon had ironically converted him by repeating just once too often the artless pretences that men thought they believed.

For the plain fact was, as he now stood stock-still on the pavement, that Adam was aware he had made up his mind never to return to Marathon and his church there.

He knew with the greatest coolness and satisfaction that he was going to cauterize out of himself his profession, his family, and his insincere relationship with the world. And now that he meant to do just that, he was struck only by the wonder why he had not done so long before.

He would be free henceforth to do as he chose. To do what? Something, of course, but he did not, at least, have to decide about that yet. It was enough for the moment to realize he was his own man again for the first time since his youth. And this sense of freedom had about it a peculiar surprise, since, like most people, he had not previously noticed that he was enslaved.

He had begun to walk on more rapidly in the last few moments, as the idea swelled and overthrew all obstacles in its path. He argued with himself genially, merely to please himself, and to taste his resolve more fully, for he was indifferent of consequences. Soon he had reached his hotel. In his impersonal room, he went at once to the writing table. He began to write fluently as if he had written this very letter in his mind a long time ago: "My dear Antoinette . . ."

PART IV

1944

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

ON A SEPTEMBER afternoon several years later Adam Mallory was typing at the shaky table that served him for a desk in the rooming-house where he was now living.

This was in Brooklyn, in the section along the river called Columbia Heights, not far away from the same building where, one midnight long ago, he had turned his back on a doorway from which a girl had sent him an exciting invitation by a finger at her lip. But he could no longer recall what she had looked like, or even what her name had been.

Adam had lodged here in the shabby single room a year now; he had, so to speak, come back to the environment where he had been born, in obedience to that mysterious impulse which urges a man to return to his beginnings when at last life begins to close in, and he is tired, and curious no longer.

For in the past few years he had aged rapidly in appearance, though it was impossible to say how this effect was produced, since his hair was still thick, his gait as swift and as limber, and the shine of his eyes as burnished. But he had begun to think of himself as old, that was it, and his expression reported this with resignation and tolerance, and so made it clear to anyone who cared to notice.

He had wandered intensively and somewhat aimlessly before he had settled here. He had wanted to escape from all reminders of his former existence, and also, perhaps, from himself. But as the new war had then been approaching with clear inevitability, he could go to no remoter place than Mexico. Before he had gone he had heard from Antoinette. It was the sort of reply he might have expected.

Beneath its characteristic ramblings the utmost calmness was perceptible. It had an air of tolerantly humouring him, as if she refused to take him seriously for an instant. He had already arranged legally that she was to have nearly everything he had. He had left himself with just enough to live

on, and thought this only fair. For it mattered more to her, and she had the responsibility of the children. He could travel occasionally if he were careful, but from now on he would have to live very modestly.

But not even the fact of this settlement appeared to have impressed Antoinette. She evidently thought he was behaving in such a ridiculous manner that she did not even wish to discuss it. She wrote soothingly that she hoped he would have a nice "vacation"; she was sure he hadn't really had a long enough one abroad. And the implication was that whenever he wished to return, the door would be open, no uncomfortable questions would be asked, and all would go on with the same matter-of-fact mildness as heretofore. Adam knew that if any time, no matter when, he suddenly appeared, she would simply say it was a pleasant day, or that it was too bad it wasn't one, just as though he had merely strolled out a minute before for a breath of air.

Then in due course a sympathetic letter came from the church Board in reply to his formal resignation. It expressed the most sympathetic concern for his health and added that though a new minister had temporarily taken his place, it was with the understanding that this was held open for him whenever he was able to return.

Of course, Antoinette had contrived that, too, in her casual but impressive way. They thought him ill, and that he had hesitated to say so out of some peculiar sensibility or other. Yes, she had certainly left the door open, left everything easy of access, whenever his foolish impulse was spent and his absurd mood had changed!

He wryly recognized her shrewdness, and recognized it more as time went on. That was her temptation, that declaration of an absence of all criticism of his behaviour, which would neither be implied nor even felt. But his own strength consisted of knowing hers.

He had need of it, for he began to discover presently he was physically too old for adventures of even the quietest sort. He acknowledged that his comfort mattered a great

deal—such ignoble concerns—for instance, as having a soft bed to sleep upon. He had left Mexico finally, purchased the cheapest secondhand car he could find, adopted a mongrel dog, and then began to wander at will. But it was not much fun. Freedom was certainly not just killing time! Besides, this idleness seemed to display his behaviour even in his own eyes as unconscionably selfish.

Then all at once the solution and the justification had come to him. He would write a book! A book, an inquiry, a confession, an examination, one more struggle to describe colours as only his eyes had perceived them, one more determination to report, to interpret, and of course, to alter.

He sold the secondhand car, found a friendly home for the mongrel dog, and headed East. He settled almost with a kind of sigh into the decaying rooming-house in Columbia Heights, and had been there ever since.

The book, the great work, that was to justify him, had proceeded steadily. It was inevitable, of course that in Adam's case it should have something of the character of a series of sermons, though not their usual content.

Indeed, it had a consistent if loose idea by which discursiveness on many topics was held together.

Adam, too, had discovered a divining rod whereby one could pick out the sheep from the goats; he had discovered his own solution of how to make things as they were into things as they should be.

For everything evil, he had quietly decided, was rooted simply in self-deceit. That was the trouble—the whole trouble. Nearly everybody had a sort of furtive inkling of the sources and aims of his own behaviour. Yet nearly everybody continued to ascribe virtuous motives to his own actions. And nearly everybody, by implication, asserted as much to the rest. And to himself, too, more was the pity!

Of late, unfortunately, there had appeared new and stronger means to ensure this determined mass hypocrisy.

For an enormous literacy had rapidly increased while the wisdom and intelligence to make use of it had not increased

in the least. Humanity now portrayed itself more tenderly than ever in the most warm and admiring light.

By such directives men anxiously moulded themselves according to the pattern of the pretensions currently ascribed to them.

Of course, this was not the fault of the moulders—the admired statesmen of all kinds, and the clever exhorters who operated behind the façades of the stately weekly magazines, the oppressively elaborate movies, and the indefatigable radio stations. It was absurd to accuse them; in a way they were perfectly sincere, and they had not at all, as they themselves supposed, elevated themselves to such authority and influence by their own shrewdness. On the contrary it was the mass that had done that. It had chosen deliberately, by means of its patronage, all such counsellors and directors. It eagerly approved of them, and earnestly supported them, as the persons most likely to confirm it in its own ignorance and hypocrisy. It would appear, indeed, to be already the age of the regrettably common man.

How, Adam rhetorically demanded, was this gigantic self-swindle, which had existed always and was the blind spot of human life, to be overcome?

Simply by admitting it, of course! Was it not time, he asked, to question the old stale insistence upon the immutability of human nature? That would prove mutable, once the race was persuaded to abandon its declarations of virtue!

For if man in the individual at last faced man in the mass, would he not begin to entertain certain qualms, and consider the possibility of actual change?

Would not humanity, turning in repugnance from the flattering explanations of an entire world that competed whether in war or in peace with the utmost ferocity and the utmost futility, finally also turn in repugnance from the competition itself?

Then there would come to an end the dubious moral concepts of right and wrong, for all such distinctions must inevitably be dissolved by understanding. And with under-

standing the curious primitive vindictiveness men called justice might come to its well-deserved end also.

These, and similar conclusions, Adam attempted to express with biting satire, but often he became so angry in the composing of them that his irony was quite drowned out in his own indignation.

Today, as he sat here tapping his typewriter with an intent face, he had been having his say about war. There was probably nothing much left to say about that.

However, Adam embodied his solution in the invention of the first internationalist martyr:

... for, of course, if war is actually to cease on earth, the means to bring this will be a man and not a weapon. At any time this extraordinary person may appear. Let us call him Walter P. Brown.

It will be Brown's lot, presumably, to attract a mild notoriety by the assertion that to love one's country is to hate humanity. He will advocate the abolishing of all patriotic anthems and the confiscation of all distinguishing flags.

He will assert that it is advisable to give up forever the primitive belief in the sacredness of familiar but quite unimportant national customs, and that the fall or rise of any particular country is in point of time meaningless.

Then he will probably propose the formation of a curious organization of his own, dedicated only to the overthrowing of all the rest. Its principal requirement will be the subscription to a declaration by each member that he will never aid, abet, defend, or serve his own country at the expense of any other under any circumstances whatsoever, thus establishing in all lands a segment who would frustrate the efforts of their own people to go to war with any other. In a word what he will advocate is that countries should be abolished altogether; and that until they are, war, which springs simply from rivalry between them, will most certainly endure; and that those who profoundly enjoy the

illusory advantages of nationalism, should at least be aware of the remarkably high price they are compelled to pay for them.

All this, of course, will be very well, and serve to amuse the populace during a dull year. But if it so happens that in the year following, another war occurs, Walter P. Brown, to the surprise and indignation of everyone, instead of at once recanting and admitting that circumstances alter cases and that he is now quite as eager as everyone else when it comes down to hard facts, will persist in his heresies. His countrymen will naturally be incensed at such conscienceless behaviour. He will be tried and executed out of hand.

And then—is there not at least a chance?—a few frightened disciples may later come out of hiding, and gradually, very gradually, their numbers will increase; and eventually his idea may become as commonplace as poor Brown himself—it may become a fact!

Adam ceased. He felt immensely tired. Looking at the clock, he was surprised to see how late it was. How long had he been sitting here in this airless room? He reflected that he had neglected even to eat any lunch. Perhaps he should eat something now; at any rate, he needed to stretch his legs in a walk, get out into the open.

He found his hat and started out. But a walk through the neighbourhood was not enough. And somehow he did not want to eat anything yet; he had no appetite.

On impulse he made for the subway, and crossed over to New York. Getting off at 42nd Street, without a conscious purpose still, he directed his steps east, and then began to walk up Third Avenue.

The weather was still very warm. Overhead the elevated trains clattered at intervals. Below in the tepid street it was dark. There were a great many delicatessens, cheap restaurants, and murky pawnshops ranged side by side. A dingy bar occupied nearly every corner. A number of junk shops took on the airs of self-declared antique stores.

Looking about him, Adam saw he was somewhere in the Sixties. But already his first burst of energy had evaporated in the uninviting warmth. He was thirsty and felt like sitting down. He decided he would drop in at the very next bar and sip a glass of cool beer.

There was one directly ahead of him at the corner. Its dirty reek was softened by an unlighted dimness. Adam carried his beer over to a round, shaky table. He drank a little, and looked vaguely about him. The bartender was making a show of wiping glasses. Only three or four patrons were in the place at this hour. They were huddled all together at one end of the bar, and seemed to be engaged in some monotonous, wrangling dispute or other. Occasionally an oath or a filthy exclamation would burst upward from them.

One of them, rather a tall man with slumped shoulders, occupied the solitary bar stool. He seemed to be the most vituperative and obscene of the lot. Adam could not make out what he was saying, but surmised it with some accuracy from his tone. It was not an uneducated voice. Gazing at this man's back, Adam observed that the soiled, unpressed suit was originally of excellent material and design, and that the battered hat, slapped cockily on a head of greying, unkempt hair, had evidently come down in the world.

As Adam thus lifelessly gazed there, the man he was staring at suddenly turned and spat and met his eye. He was well over fifty. In spite of the sagging masses and the irregular lines, graven as if by a woodcutter's tool, the face had something curiously elegant about it. There was a kind of exhausted insolence about his expression. Yet behind this there was something gentle, too, though this was like the gentleness of illness.

The stranger had paused to gape at Adam with a staggered expression. Now he lurched down in a heap from his stool, his mouth spread in a wide delighted grin, his hand already outstretched as he advanced.

Then for the first time Adam realized who it was, and

saw that once more, after this long lapse of years, he was looking at Julian Gamble.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

ADAM WAS SURPRISED, almost disturbed, as he entered the place in which he found his old friend living. Yet the house to which Julian had immediately insisted on drawing him, saying it was just down the block, was perfectly commonplace. It was built of dun-coloured stone, was four stories in height, and stood among other houses making similar pinched, rather clerkly claims to respectability.

But somehow about the building there hovered that unsettling feeling of a cynical consciousness which now and then invests inanimate things and causes them to appear to be watching an intruder inimically and scornfully.

The place was certainly inordinately dirty inside, and though evidently it now pretended to be a kind of apartment house, not much effort had been made to separate it into divisions of privacy. All the rooms seemed to open into one another as though shared together; and from above, as Adam walked in, there floated down the faint, almost lifeless murmur of a low voice or two and other indistinguishable sounds.

Passing through a dark hallway up a darker stairway, he learned that the second floor of this house was occupied by Julian in entirety. All the doors were open here also, as if it were impossible to shut them. In the principal room, which was very high and big in a forlorn memory of former stateliness, a piano was backed into one corner. There was much untidiness visible. The rugs were worn, and sent up puffs of dust like a mist when trodden upon; the wallpaper had slowly faded in the perpetual gloom, and now had an unsunned, insanitary look. From a sagging brocaded chair where Julian had deposited him, Adam could see through a porticoed entrance into another room beyond. In there, on

a brass bed, some blankets were twisted in a lump over wrinkled sheets. And in the opposite direction just across his shoulder, still another greasy, opened door disclosed a small kitchen heaped with all manner of soiled utensils, dishes, and decaying food—the kind of place that conveys nauseating suggestions of cockroaches rambling eagerly between empty cans and discarded whiskey bottles.

Julian immediately disappeared into this latter alcove, and returned with two glasses of gin which he had evidently mixed only with water from the tap. Adam barely tasted his, and then pushed it out of reach. Julian, on the contrary, sipped his own gratefully. Yet, though he had no doubt been drinking in some such manner as this for some hours previously, he was certainly not drunk, scarcely even sodden. It was as though what he was imbibing merely served to maintain his normal being.

Uncomfortably alive to all this degrading atmosphere, Adam gazed at his old friend's face and tried to disavow how this had happened to him. He felt he knew Julian astonishingly well. It was as if, without even recalling him for a moment in the many years that had elapsed since seeing him, his knowledge of Julian had nevertheless gone on quietly climbing and expanding like an invisible seed. Or was it rather only his own deepened knowledge of himself that now enabled him to gaze with a complete comprehension upon someone who had formerly seemed perplexing and obscure?

And he could not help but be pleased by Julian's clearly sincere delight at having thus run into him. Julian was doing his best to be agreeable; in a way that would once have been uncharacteristic of him, he was now asking questions and apparently showing an interest in someone else.

Adam told Julian briefly most of what had happened to him, without trying to explain it, and then asked Julian curiously about himself.

"I supposed you were still out in Hollywood. I read somewhere or other about your being there."

Julian took a relishing gulp of his tepid gin and water. "Hell, no!" he muttered with a faint flash of his old self. But he subsided promptly and gave a wheezy, indifferent laugh. "This is better."

As if to see what he could mean, Adam glanced around again at the tawdry apartment into which the dimness of evening was beginning to creep without any noticeable softening effect. Suddenly an explanation occurred to him: Julian was working here at his painting, earnestly and seriously at last. Assuming he must be right, he asked Julian about his work.

"Work?" Julian grunted. "I don't work any more."

Adam decided then that the interpretation was far simpler, it was merely that Julian had fallen upon evil days.

But Julian immediately disabused him of this idea also, his face growing a little harder and filling with an echo of his old brutality.

"I don't have to work. A couple of years ago my sister died—a rich old devil who'd saved every penny. And by God, she left it all to me!"

"But then why," Adam demanded, "do you stay here?"

Julian laughed again, rather benevolently.

"Why? Because I damn well like it here! . . . Drink up, and I'll freshen our glasses."

Adam said he didn't want any more right away, and Julian swayed off into his malodorous kitchen with the grace that, at least, had never deserted him. Yet he looked quite weak, as though the lightest push might send him sprawling, and his confidence, which reports itself not in a man's eyes but in his shoulders, had come at last to terms with time.

When Julian came swaying back in the same indolent way, Adam said bluntly:

"Seems to me you could have done better than this, Julian!"

Julian set his glass down slowly and streaked off a rim of film from the lip of it with a finger, not much cleaner.

Neither his face nor his voice was bitter. On the contrary, they were surprisingly gentle.

"Do you think there is anything that could ever have stopped me if I'd had any real stuff? All those excuses people make are just alibis—being a drunk, and having a lousy wife, and so on. All that means is they didn't have any stuff, but just a little stinking talent. Well, I'm better than that—I don't make excuses. I was just no damn good, that's all."

"Did you ever actually try?" Adam asked grimly.

Julian's expression grew sardonic. As he scratched himself, he looked for a moment like some weary old satyr blinking out of the mouth of a cave.

"Yes, I tried," he said quietly. "I was that big an ass myself. Oh, sure, I found out all right! I even killed a girl to make her pay for it—killed her dead, I guess."

Julian was silent a moment. "Hell!" he muttered then. "Let's stop talking about all this!"

The eyes of the two men, from whom now even the securities of middle age were inexorably slipping, met in a glance of compassion and regret. After a pause Adam asked reminiscently:

"Have you ever run across Zacharias or Will Giles again?"

Julian shook his head indifferently.

Again they were both quiet. Then a shadowy recollection passed across Adam's mind, and he laughed a little ruefully.

"Julian, do you remember one night, when the four of us ate together in a pretty bad restaurant just before we sailed that time? And we all swore to meet again just like that, and eat in the same place exactly twenty years afterward to the night?"

"Did we?" said Julian vaguely. "Why, yes, I guess we did."

"You know, in a way I wish we'd kept that promise."

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's as if we all betrayed ourselves by breaking it somehow. We really meant it at the time. And

yet, when it came around, not one of us even so much as remembered it!"

Julian emptied his glass. He shook his head. "Can you imagine it? You and me and Zack and little Giles sitting around a table now and just staring at each other!"

"Yes, I know. But I'm sorry somehow."

The room had steadily been growing darker and darker so that it was hard to see distinctly any more. And meanwhile, as an abandoned farmhouse fills at night with obscure creaking sounds, augmented by the scamperings, perhaps, of hungry mice, so the faint noises here had grown gradually louder and more insistent—bursts of distant laughter, indistinguishable interjections, footsteps passing rapidly along a hallway, followed by a hollowly slammed door.

Then several of those who were apparently responsible for these ghostly vibrations suddenly appeared in Julian's doorway. It was too dim now even to make out their faces. But one of them said in a high-pitched voice that possessed a singular yet indefinable quality of affectation:

"What in the world are you doing here in the dark like this, Julian? It's so morbid of you! Mind if I turn on the lights?" With the confidence of familiarity he immediately did so, adding with a start: "Oh, I see you're not alone!"

His eyes took in Adam with a glance that appeared to sum him up in a flash by some standards all his own, to be unquestioningly certain of this computation, and to pass on, all in the same second, with the utmost indifference.

But Adam himself, rather taken back, kept on staring, with no such easy answer. The stranger seemed to be in his early thirties. He was short and plump, and possessed shallow, remarkably luminous eyes. He was expensively dressed in such things as an imported silk scarf with a bizarre pattern, a perfectly cut Oxford jacket, and shoes that very possibly had been custom-made. Did he, like Julian, live *here*?

Behind him were two others, one a man of about the same age with a haggard, arresting face. He remained quite silent

and fixed in rigid immobility. But beneath this compelled restraint there seemed to be something lashing and quivering, a sensitiveness so intense that it filled the room with its emanations.

And just back of him, the third newcomer was in striking contrast to the other two. He had an immense, powerful frame, and was the youngest of the three, scarcely more than a youth. Beneath a mane of thick, curly hair, his heavy, rather handsome face wore a doltish expression that seemed to be groping sullenly for intelligence. Julian introduced the two older men as the owners of the building and his landlords. The first man, who was named Sam Peck, burst into an immediate gabble of talk. It was the kind of speech that usually is described as crisp, being full of curt, unrelated phrases, abrupt irrelevancies, and self-interruptions. It bordered ceaselessly on the outskirts of an unexplained derision, and made claims to humour with intonations rather than ideas.

His companion, the intense, quivering, silent one, was called Edmund Carling; he said nothing.

What they wanted was the use of Julian's rooms for this evening for a party they were giving. His apartment provided the largest general space in the house. Julian indolently acquiesced. He seemed on excellent terms with them, and a faint, indulgent smile had become fixed on his mouth. He dryly indicated the condition of his rooms at the moment, whereupon Peck, showing he had been prepared for this, turned to the doltish youth, who had been lowering all this time in the background.

"Joey, get busy!" Peck ordered shrewishly: "Come on now—that's a good boy! You'd better take the bedroom first."

Joey lumbered into the other room, and began at once to make up the bed there with his great paws.

Then Julian suggested to Adam that they themselves go out around the corner and have a bite somewhere, and come back afterward in time to join the party.

They ate some hash and doughnuts and coffee at the stools of a lunch counter in the neighbourhood. They lingered smoking. Presently Julian said:

"I'll bet you've never been to a party like this one that's coming off!"

"Why? What kind of party is it?"

Julian laughed.

"You'll see."

By the time they got back the party had already begun. The hallway was choked with arriving guests; the bell rang ceaselessly, as still newer arrivals kept pouring in; and at this rate it seemed as if the house would scarcely hold them all, and that not only Julian's rooms would be full, but the other floors as well.

There was an unaccountable excitement going on, an uproar of greetings, exclamations and shouts. Everywhere, eyes jumped about with a kind of glitter, men accosted each other effusively, or waved across heads joyously to friends and acquaintances.

As Adam followed Julian into his now crowded apartment, he was surprised by the odd discrepancy that marked the people here. He was struck, also, by the fact that while all the streets and bars these days were full of men in military uniform, there were only a few of these to be seen in this party. And this was odd, because, though there were several quite elderly men present, by far the larger number were mere youths. Some of these had a rather shabby, furtive look. The glances of all of them were restless. Full of activity themselves, they seemed to be constantly aware of what was going on everywhere else.

Julian edged his way into the now clean kitchen. The sink had been filled with cracked ice. He made himself a stiff highball and told Adam to do likewise.

Just then Julian was hailed by someone in the crush outside to whom he answered with a shout: "Well, for God's

sake!" Then he edged his way out, and promptly disappeared in the crowd.

Annoyed by, though familiar with, this trait of callous desertion, Adam picked his own way out alone into the principal room, holding the weak highball he had made for himself.

He was again puzzled by something in this gathering that, though perfectly definite, continued to elude him. Julian had hinted at this without making himself any clearer.

Certainly most of these guests were highly at variance, not only in their ages, but also in their surface indications of education and class. Here and there a face stood out with startling familiarity—the face of some celebrity or other of the gossip columns, whose photograph had often been reproduced in the magazines and newspapers. But the large majority present were very young men. And nearly all these seemed deliberately projecting an excessive boyishness.

One young man had promptly annexed the piano, and was now mingling skilful improvisations with the latest popular tunes. His playing had a wonderful light charm. Adam spied Julian at last, listening to him, a smile on his face. But the crowd was too dense to make it easy to reach his side, nor at the moment had Adam any inclination to do so.

Meanwhile, against the cascading sound of the music and through the din going on all around, Adam began to pick up fragmentary utterances.

A man of about thirty, close at hand, wearing a torn sweater and dungaree trousers, and bounding on his toes, was delivering the surprising information that he had suffered very heavy losses on the stock exchange that day to a new arrival who explained that he himself had just come here from cleaning out a cellar. And from the snatches of talk that rose on all sides, as Adam pushed aimlessly on with a polite social smile on his face, he gathered that others followed such heterogeneous occupations as ballet dancers and department-store clerks, decorators and even pro-

fessional men, while yet more seemed simply to be idlers, or perhaps to be living in some mysterious way on their wits.

But Adam could only divine these things, for much of what conversation he caught puzzled him by the peculiar jargon in which it was couched.

"Look at that mad queen over there!" he overheard a man of about forty exclaim, thickset and full of a surly toughness. "Just watch her camp!" He burlesqued whomever it was, as he spoke, with a falsetto voice and wriggling shoulders, making this seem altogether ridiculous imposed upon his aspect of lumbering maleness.

Adam obediently looked, too, but he could not pick out the woman that this obscure remark referred to; and, in fact, it now struck him as remarkable that there was only a handful of women present. Had there been none at all there would, of course, have been nothing noticeable about that. But the fact that there were only a half dozen or so here seemed odd.

Adam noticed one of them with much admiration: a tall, and quite strikingly beautiful brunette, wearing a superb evening gown, but a little too excessively made up, perhaps. As she paraded about the room entirely alone, she seemed to throw everywhere unnecessarily disdainful glances from her fine eyes.

Just then his attention was drawn by the fact that a space in the centre of the room had been cleared, and that a solo dance was about to be performed by yet another of the few women present. Unlike the striking brunette, this one was anything but prepossessing. She had a singularly fuzzy crop of hair, and was wearing a soiled, pink dress.

Now, as the piano adroitly followed her, she began to dance in an elaborate fashion that was nearly indescribable. To begin with, it was hard to say when it was intended to be serious and when the most blatant burlesque, for each quality constantly flowed into, or interrupted, the other. Adam heard little slurring comments purring up from all around him and occasional bursts of laughter at her more

outrageous antics. Suddenly she ceased and bowed double, there was a feeble scattering of applause, and the noise promptly rose again on all sides.

But as, a little flushed and breathless, she pushed her way through the crowd near where Adam stood, and he attempted to allow her to pass, he was startled by a familiar quality in the eyes as if he had seen them somewhere before, and something in their glance told him that he, too, was recognized. The next instant, with the effect of a violent blow, he realized who it was: Sam Peck, one of the owners of this building, whom he had met barely an hour before, and who was now thus bewigged and grotesquely outfitted in his seedy female finery.

Adam's aghast gaze was met promptly by Sam Peck's look of defiance and contempt. The next moment he had pushed past and was gone.

Adam experienced a kind of sinking feeling, followed by a sense of panic such as he might have known on discovering himself trapped in a burning building. There was no doubt of it, he was even absurdly frightened by the disclosure of the sort of people he had now realized for the first time he was among. But even more than this, his vanity was hurt at the reflection of what a fool he had been, in spite of his lack of experience, not to have guessed the truth long before this.

As he now stared palely at the seething crowd that was making so immense an uproar, in the light of his new knowledge everyone looked startlingly different. Yet it still did not seem possible that all of these astonishingly varied men were victims of the same aberration. How could he, or anyone, have been expected to guess as much about a good half of them under ordinary circumstances? Why, he could have passed most of them in the streets day after day without knowing, or encountered them in offices or at luncheons! And suddenly he wondered how often in life he had met, and talked with, and occasionally even imagined he had known well a great many others like them,

without ever entertaining for a minute the least suspicion.

He gazed from one to another with an outraged frown that was unconsciously comic in its indignation, like the look of someone who had just had a humiliating joke played upon him. There was, it was true, nothing untoward going on; it was very much like any noisy, cheerful party of people out for a good time, and spurring themselves on for this with alcohol.

But now everything seemed disagreeably pointed, and he remembered the uneasy feeling he had had on even first entering this building, and his discomfort at the secret, morbid atmosphere it seemed to throw out.

And so it was with such as these that Julian, who had clearly reached the end of the descent, had at last elected to associate! At no stage of his existence, Adam grimly reflected, had Julian, in a manner of speaking, disappointed him.

He would find him at once, briefly say good-bye, and go. He looked around for a last glance, depressed still, still shocked, yet more curious than he cared to admit. The party was growing constantly more noisy, and now more boldly revealing. Had he come in at this juncture, he was sure it would not have taken him so long to hit upon his discovery. Many seemed to be uttering absurd and quite incomprehensible little shrieks. The brunette had taken his wig off, and his close-cropped boy's head, emerging from his evening gown, pouted in a spoiled way, while a fussy middle-aged man seemed endeavouring to arouse his attention. Nearly all were pretty obvious now, and it struck Adam that they were having a good time simply at being able to exhibit themselves as they actually were with the sympathetic comprehension of the rest. Probably they found it an exacerbating task to keep up, on most occasions, a laborious and doubtless obnoxious pretence.

He had seen quite enough, but as he started to take his leave, he saw Julian's other landlord, the gaunt, ravaged-looking Edmund Carling, heading deliberately in his direction. Joey trailed slowly behind him.

Carling had apparently just noticed that Adam had been left all alone, and seemed to have reminded himself of his duty as a host. But Adam confronted him with a steady, hostile look. To his confusion he felt himself instantly read and fully comprehended. But the look on Carling's face, a little sadd, did not so much ask for the viewpoint of compassion as offer its own compassionate understanding.

"You're not going, I hope. Sit down and have a drink."

There was nothing remarkable about his utterance, but his eyes suggested reserves of unusual intelligence. Yet there was something opaque about them, too, like that patent glass which offers the observer a clear view through it on one side while protecting him from observation on the other. But this concealment was nullified in turn by the extraordinary, deadly tension of his body, and his emanations of nervous force made it seem almost possible to feel exactly what he was thinking.

Rather guardedly but at the same time interested, Adam sat down. He wanted to talk about what was going on, to ask questions, but he was afraid of seeming a fool. He heard Carling mention Julian, caricaturing him at a stroke with such humour that it was impossible not to laugh. Adam relaxed. He forgot about his intention of going. Moreover, he forgot that Carling was different in any special way from other men. But once or twice he wondered what value Carling could place upon his obvious association with the doltish Joey, sitting sullenly near by. Still Carling said, almost echoing Julian's words:

"I don't suppose you've ever seen anything like a crowd of queers before?"

"No, I haven't. There are so many of them"—by a narrow margin he escaped saying "you"—"and they don't look like—well, like what I always thought they'd look like."

Carling laughed. Then his glance travelled swiftly around the room. There was a curious scorn in his eyes. He ejaculated a single, comprehensive obscenity. Adam was puzzled, for

did not the abusive term include Carling himself? Evidently Carling did not think so.

Just then Carling noticed their glasses were empty.

"Joey, see what you can do about getting a couple of fresh drinks."

Joey rose. His thick features remained as expressionless as ever. He ambled off.

Carling went on talking. He had evidently been drinking enough to lose his former exhausting silence. His talk proved worth waiting for. Adam could not remember what he said, yet he continued to receive the impression of an undoubted first-rate intelligence. He gathered that Carling taught in one of the municipal high schools, that he despised his work, that he had travelled extensively and knew a good deal about music. But as he went on talking, Carling's voice became more and more distracted, and it was clear he was not really thinking any longer of what he was saying. All at once he jumped up.

"What's keeping him, anyway? Maybe he's up to something! I've got to find out!"

Adam, startled by the abruptness and seeming importance of this concern, followed uncertainly. In the nearly dark corridor they came upon Joey leaning against the wall, and smirking as he stared back into the steady, cryptic eyes of a man attired in a Russian smock.

Carling said nothing. But his intense and painful jealousy was instantly clear. He disposed of the stranger with a single look. The latter seemed to melt, almost to disappear down the stairway. Left alone, Joey began to mumble something in a resentful, incoherent voice. All at once Carling's temper broke uncontrollably.

"You dirty little bitch, you encouraged him! Very well, get out, get out and go with him! Go ahead, and don't ever come back!"

Joey, after one uncertain glance, went rapidly with an air of relief and eagerness.

Without moving a muscle, Carling stared after him with

a bitterness that all at once seemed to age him. He glanced up and met Adam's eyes in haggard misery.

Adam suddenly knew that Carling was suffering horribly. For a moment he was even afraid he was going to sob. He had never imagined that such emotions formed any part of an aberration which, like most men, he had simply dismissed as either unutterably disgusting, or contemptibly grotesque. So Carling's ridiculous behaviour, set off so violently by his obvious brains, bewildered him. He realized with surprise that the victims of this unhappy sexual perversity were lovers as much as weak sensualists, that they were capable of the most serious emotions about it, and that they were even, perhaps, more at the mercy of such emotions than perfectly normal men.

Carling did not speak again. He turned, and began wearily to climb the stairway to the upper floor.

Adam watched him. To his own astonishment he found himself feeling profoundly sorry for him.

With his hat under his arm, Adam stole out to the now completely re-wrecked kitchen to see if there were any coffee left. Someone had made a pot of it nearly an hour ago.

Julian was asleep at last, collapsed in a chair in the other room, beside a table where his unattended cigarettes had burned grooves, and his spilled whiskey glasses had made rings. What a time Adam had had with him! It had been a disagreeable ordeal.

For, on going back to say good-bye to him, after the episode with Edmund Carling, Adam had found his old friend disastrously drunk and nearly uncontrollable. He had become quarrelsome, though with Adam he restrained this attitude. Adam had tried to straighten him up. With the aid of a little Jewish actors' agent at the party, who had volunteered his services, he got Julian out and walked him staggeringly around the block. Then he made him eat something, and dragged Julian from an impending row with the proprietor of the place. Afterward he had much difficulty

in persuading Julian not to enter a bar. He had coaxed and then bullied. Only at the threat of walking off and leaving him had Julian succumbed to his will.

By the time they had gone back, the party had thinned out all at once with the silent swiftness of moths. A mournful emptiness had succeeded all the uproar. Only a few still lingered, as if they did not know where else to go. One shabby-looking youth was spread out along the stair as if murdered there, holding the banisters in his sleep in a fierce clutch. The weary monotonous thumping of the piano was still going on. But the sound rose listlessly, died away, and with a sick effort, rose again.

Then Julian triumphantly unearthed an unopened bottle of whiskey, which he had earlier, with disagreeable cunning, cached away for himself for just such an emergency. He insisted on the little Jewish actors' agent drinking with him. Adam decided exhaustedly that the best thing was to let Julian drink himself into unconsciousness and put him to bed. But it was to the actors' agent that this happened instead. He was now snoring with all his clothes on in Julian's bed in the next room. It was much later before Julian himself had fallen into a stertorous doze in the chair where he sprawled and snarlingly harangued.

As he now entered the kitchen Adam wondered why he had gone to all this trouble. Looking through the dirty windowpanes, he noticed without surprise that the dawn was not far away. The sky had the cold greyness of a bleached oyster-shell. The street was grim and empty. Everything was very still.

Pouring out the last cup in the pot, he saw that it had become stonecold, and had a bitter look besides. He left it untasted. Then at last, as he turned to leave, he perceived that Julian had once more awakened and stood in the doorway, blinking and stretching.

Julian's face was blotched, and his hair had the unkempt, matted look of a tramp. Nevertheless, it looked as if his short nap had halfway sobered him up.

"Well, there it is," he said thickly and vacantly. "There it is! . . . Is there a drink left in this joint anywhere?"

Adam's patience was at an end. He felt exasperated. He thought once more, but with a hard contempt, of what hideous straits Julian had come to. Living in a place like this, seeing people like these night after night, perhaps seeing no one else! He had noticed how easily Julian was accepted by all the rest. They treated him rather as the animals of one species often treat another that, though dangerous, is disposed to be friendly. That is to say, they showed respectful indifference toward him in place of fear or hostility. But their tolerance of him came from something more than Julian's own tolerance of them. Perhaps it was that they dimly recognized that he was quite as much of a moral outcast as they were themselves.

He watched Julian pour out a drink with a shaky hand from the nearly depleted bottle, fetch it up to his lips a couple of times, gag without tasting it, and then set it down as if to wait for the strength necessary to poison himself.

"I wonder if you know how disgusting your life strikes me," Adam burst out. "All these people you're living with now!"

"Disgusting, hell!" Julian exclaimed scornfully. "You're just like all the other damn parsons. What's the matter with them, anyway?"

"Oh, I'm sorry for them," said Adam impatiently. "But why do you have to associate with them—live here with them?"

The inquiry appeared to arrest Julian. His anger evaporated and he gravely considered. He seemed to recapture his concentration with a great sad effort. His lips came together in an uncoordinated twist.

"I guess I can't stand anybody else now," he said after a pause. "I can't stand women because I've had too many of them, and because I don't want them any more. Besides, they make you fight them; you have to beat them, or else

they'll beat you. And I can't stand men because there's nothing to talk to them about. Hell, I know what the fools are going to say before they even open their mouths! You don't expect me to be interested in talking politics or business, do you? Now, these people are like women—they're interesting to be with, and they make you laugh. Only they let me alone. They just raise hell with each other."

Adam looked at him wonderingly. All at once, in spite of everything, he felt touched by Julian, swaying there in front of him with his streaked, aging eyes.

"I think you live among them only because they happen to be even more unhappy than you are," he said astutely. "And you certainly can't go on like this any more. It will kill you, or drive you crazy. Why don't you go away somewhere—as soon as you can?"

Julian seemed pleased by the concern in Adam's voice. But he only smiled grimly.

"Go away where?" he said.

Adam fell silent. "Well," he said at last in a matter-of-fact voice, "I'd better be going."

But Julian instantly protested: "Don't go!"

"I don't stay up like this often. I've got to go home and get some sleep."

"Then I'll go with you," Julian promptly declared.

"You can't," said Adam. "All I've got is a small room. I couldn't even put you up."

Julian seemed to grow more desperate with each refusal. Long and long ago, a startlingly handsome child, he must have pleaded thus persistently with some forgotten nurse and triumphed in the end.

Suddenly he uttered a loud exclamation. "I'll tell you what we'll do! We'll do just what we were speaking about earlier tonight! Let's get hold of Zack, and we'll all take a trip and find Giles again and have that dinner together after all!"

Adam laughed abruptly. "Are you crazy?" he demanded. "We admitted that wouldn't be any good."

"That's the reason why we ought to do it!" Julian asserted fiercely.

"What am I arguing with you about, anyway?" Adam said. "You couldn't get Zacharias in the first place. Why, when it comes to that, you couldn't even reach him!"

"I couldn't, eh?"

Julian's eyes narrowed. Suddenly he downed his drink. Then he nodded arrogantly, and started at once for the other room. Puzzled to see what he was up to, Adam followed. They entered the bedroom together. On the bed the little actors' agent breathed noisily through his opened mouth.

"Max!"

Julian prodded him in the ribs but elicited only an agonized, trailing groan. Ignoring any further tactics of this sort, Julian then bent over and pulled out the contents of his bulging breast pocket. Among heterogeneous things was a small address book.

Julian gave a mutter of triumph. He fumbled through the pages, holding them far from, and then close to, his eyes. Then he dropped down heavily into a chair beside the telephone and began to dial a number.

Adam watched him with something of his early astonishment. Was he really meaning to rouse up Zacharias at this hour with a suggestion so brash? But hardly had the call been put through when it was answered, as if Zacharias, or someone there, were also awake and up.

Bewilderedly Adam heard Julian's confident voice, broken by an easy laugh or so, and ending after a few brief sentences with the calm assurance: "We'll be right up!" Then he rang off.

"You see?" said Julian patronizingly. "How damned easy it is? Sure we'll get Zach to go all right! Said he wants to see you, too."

"Very well," said Adam, taken aback yet not dreaming anything would come of it, "you're right. I'll go that far with you, anyway."

Julian pulled his battered hat on, and they left the house together. A burden seemed to fall from Adam's shoulders the moment he found himself away from the building, with its stale odours of the dead party and all its morbid associations. Outside it was cool and fresh. Some sparrows hopped restlessly and uttered monotonous sounds. Adam's head felt light. At the corner Julian managed to hail a lonely passing cab.

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

THE SENSE OF reality, which is dependent upon a conformity with the most meticulous and trivial conditions, seemed utterly in abeyance when Adam stood at length before the door of Zacharias' apartment and vacantly beheld Julian pressing the bell.

The insanities of the night still hung about him, but besides this impression there seemed to be something dream-like in arriving here thus for a purpose so absurd and at an hour so unconventional. For even in the small square of hallway where the elevator had deposited them, this hollow stone box wherein a harsh light burned as perpetually as an altar candle, the dawn could somehow be felt behind the thick walls. That at such a time and upon the most capricious of whims he and Julian should now be preparing to renew a friendship that had been indifferently laid aside for so many years, seemed to Adam so disordered and fantastic that he did not allow himself to be entirely conscious of it.

Then the door opened, and he was reassured by the sight of Zacharias standing there, appearing neither bewildered nor indignant himself, but instead pleased, enormously pleased and almost grateful.

A dozen impressions struck upon Adam at once which required to be disentangled later. What he perceived first of

all was certainly the least significant of them: the magnificent purple-silk dressing gown which Alfred was wearing, emblazoned all over with golden dragons and crescent moons. This loud, elaborate costume conveyed an impression of Oriental foreignness, as though it encased some luxurious Pasha or rich Levantine merchant.

After that Adam beheld in an inseparable blend the elegancies of the apartment into which Alfred now ushered them—the thick Chinese rugs, the laquered cabinets, the ornate lamps, all the handsome and lavish appointments. There was a clock that was a rococo masterpiece in ivory, gold, and tinted crystal; and some books, ranged upon a fine French table, that were supported by heavy lumps of jade, and were bound in coloured leather with glittering gilt tops. Everything was oppressively expensive and un-homely. Alfred must be very wealthy, indeed!

But it was not until he had seated himself and gazed curiously at his old companion that Adam became aware of the most obvious and startling fact of all about him: Zacharias was shockingly ill.

He looked, anyone would have said, like a dying man. His complexion had a repellent, greenish tinge; his eyes were sunken into deep pits; there was a kind of haggard exhaustion everywhere about him.

His ugly, sickly face glanced from one to the other with his lips twisted a little enigmatically. It was plain that he had noted at once that Julian was in an erratic alcoholic stage, but his expression seemed to say that he would not have it otherwise. He rubbed his knee with a look of pleasure, murmuring in the nearly toneless, shattered voice of an invalid:

"It's certainly been a long time—a long time! But what brought you two to look me up now? Did you just happen to be thinking about me?"

"Glad we didn't wake you, anyway," Adam said hastily, as if anxious to postpone as long as possible the declaration of Julian's embarrassingly crazy intention. "Julian and I

happened to run into each other by accident last night, and we got to talking about you, of course, and so——”

But Zacharias interrupted, his voice taking on a curiously alive, eager note: “Oh, no, you didn’t wake me—you couldn’t! I hardly sleep any more. I can’t—my nerves are all shot! I’m not well, you see.”

Adam made vague murmurs of condolence, unable to deny something that was so painfully clear. Then he added that he hoped their ringing had not disturbed Alfred’s family.

“Oh, no,” Zacharias answered. “I’m all alone here—except for the Chinese boy who looks after me.” He added, as if rather bored by the explanation and only anxious to get it out of the way: “My wife always stays in the country these days until late in the Fall—almost until she thinks it’s time for her to go to Miami.” His voice contained a peevish sound.

“You have a family, then?” Adam inquired.

“I have a son,” Zacharias answered impatiently. “He’s in the army now, of course, the chemical branch—he’s perfectly safe! His mother was clever enough to manage that!”

Zacharias seemed anxious to drop the subject. “You probably noticed right away how differently I look,” he continued, as if strangely pleading for agreement. “I’ve had a bad time of it, I don’t mind telling you. Why, I don’t imagine I’ll ever really be well again! I haven’t produced anything for over a year, I suppose you know, and I doubt now if I ever shall! I was operated on not six months ago, and it looks as if I’ll have to go back to the hospital any day now.”

His obvious feebleness and wasted, sallow face seemed to be illustrating his words deliberately, while at the same time a new flush had come into his cheeks as he spoke and his eyes had rather feverishly brightened. He peered at Adam as if in a silent demand for him to continue his inquiries, so Adam, murmuring sympathetically and feeling, indeed, altogether sorry for him, asked him what in particular was the matter with him.

At once Zacharias began to talk with a readiness and fullness about which there was a curious gusto not unlike the dance of a jolly skeleton. He was passionately interested in his ailment, which seemed to be of a complex internal nature. Clearly, it possessed an absorbing fascination for him. His voice bristled aggressively with obscure medical terms, suggesting that he had not only badgered his doctors for information, but had even read up privately on the subject. He continued like this in an unbroken stream, as engrossed as if he were no longer conscious of the actual identity of his visitors, and might have talked in exactly the same strain to the most casual, willing listener. Adam looked at him pityingly, thinking how much he had changed, for all his remembered passion and emotion seemed to have deserted their old aims and to have turned back upon himself with blind exclusiveness. He was really not interested in anything else any more.

All this while, Julian, after a loud preliminary outburst of greeting and a warm thumping of Alfred on the shoulders, had kept obscurely silent, draped bonelessly into a chair across the room, shielding his eyes with his hands and staring steadily at Zacharias with a look that was at once affable and disturbingly cynical.

But now, with that callousness that seemed apparently never to draw the line at anything, he burst out with the bluntest rudeness:

"Oh, to hell with all that! We didn't come up here to listen to your beastly operations. All right! You're sick! We know it! But what we want is to get you to come along and find Will Giles with us."

Zacharias gave him a surly, indignant look and then recovered himself.

"Giles?" he repeated in a puzzled tone.

Adam laughed deprecatingly. "Blame it on Julian, not me!"

"Giles?" said Zacharias again, more thoughtfully this time. "Why should you want to look up Giles right now?"

"Because we made a date with him about twenty-five years ago," Julian asserted forcefully; "we all made a date with each other to have dinner again some time like this—the whole damn four of us!"

"I remember," said Zacharias slowly. "I remember very well."

"Well," said Julian almost belligerently, "what do you say? How about it—will you go?"

Alfred paused. He seemed to muse. He put a finger to his lip absently, as though touching an imaginary moustache there, and murmured gravely:

"Well, I might."

Julian sank back. He did not appear especially surprised at this easy surrender to his caprice. Perhaps he had never really been surprised in life by anything except an occasional denial instead of some unconscionable demand.

"O.K.!" he said heartily. "Then you'd better dig up some breakfast for us, and you can get me a drink, too. And while I'm about it, I'll help myself to a clean shirt and a bath."

The calmness and promptness of Alfred's compliance had taken Adam aback and seemed the more unexpected because of the weakness and sickness under which he so plainly laboured.

"But," he faltered, beginning to feel that there must be something wrong with a common sense which he owned exclusively, "how are we going to get there—at least right away?"

"Oh, my car is very comfortable," said Zacharias, "and I have a good chauffeur, and all the gas I need, too. We can drive up—that's certainly the best way."

"But," Adam still confusedly protested, "how are we going to find Will? He used to be in Boston long ago, is all I remember. He may easily have moved away. Why, we haven't any idea of where to look for him, even!"

Zacharias rose as carefully as if on stilts. He walked across the room to a high, decorative writing desk and, opening

a drawer, took out a letter after a brief search. He presented this to Adam.

"Here's where you'll find him," he said.

Adam looked at the printed address on the letterhead without immediately understanding it. It was marked: "The Amanda S. Stryker Home for Elderly and Indigent Females." But a pen stroke had laboriously substituted *na* for the letter *e* in the word *Indigent*. Gazing at it for an instant, Adam saw that the letter was not from Giles, as he had immediately supposed, but only about him.

Dear Mr. Zacharias:

You probably don't know who I am, but I know all about you. You see, Will used to speak of you so often. "Mother," he used to say to me years ago, "if I ever got in the soup, all I have to do is to go to my friend, Alfred Zacharias, and he'd get me out of it just like that!" Then he'd snap his fingers—you probably remember how Will used to snap his fingers?

Anyway, he's now living just outside of New London. The address is Stonybrook Road, and the house is called "Five Elms."

Well, I wrote there and the last couple of times he hasn't answered. So I got to thinking something might have happened to him, he might be sick or something.

Though I guess I could hitch-hike my way to San Francisco easy if I wanted to, the fussbudgets who run this place won't even let you out of the grounds! (They've caught me twice already.) So then I all at once remembered you, Mr. Zacharias, and thought maybe since you were always so fond of Will, and all, you'd do me this big, big favour and go and see if he's all right. I don't know who else to write to any more.

I wish I could have written better, or have a real nice talk with you instead. I'm going to send this to some big theatre in the hopes it will reach you.

If it does, I'll be waiting night and day to hear from you.

It's a wonderful thing my boy has such good kind friends, but then anyone who knows him wouldn't be surprised at that.

Ever your sincere well-wisher and the mother of your true friend Will.

NELLY GILES.

Adam blew out his breath in a soundless whistle.

"Well, that's interesting!" he said. He looked at the letter-head again, scratched over with its painfully incongruous joke. Then for the first time he noticed the date—the letter must have been mailed almost four months ago.

Now he thought he understood Alfred's willingness to undertake this expedition so promptly, and wondered only that he had not gone by himself some time previously. But, of course, he had been too ill to undertake the journey alone; perhaps he was too ill to undertake it now even with them along.

Yet Alfred's wasted face still held the vigour of an intense longing for life, and certainly he had always known what he was doing. Adam handed the letter back, no longer resisting Julian's headlong intention that had surmounted all obstacles, and now even submitting to it willingly.

Julian himself had disappeared while he was reading. He could be heard running the shower at full blast in an opened bathroom down the hall, and seemed to be pulling out drawers rapidly and noisily somewhere or other nearby. His loud, demanding voice floated back:

"Hey, Zach! Where the hell do you keep your shirts? And how about that drink you promised to fix me?"

Zacharias did not immediately move.

"I suppose Giles is in trouble," he said as if to himself. "He was bound to be, of course." He shrugged his shoulders suddenly. "Trouble!" he repeated bitterly. "What does anyone know about trouble who still has his health?"

They were certainly almost there. The principal cities had long since flashed by; and Zacharias' big, bright car, cushioned voluptuously and shining as though only just released from its factory, floated them always steadily onward, like a gently undulant mattress. The white-haired, narrow-shouldered man who was Alfred's chauffeur kept his expressionless eyes glued to the road. The back of his head looked stolid and obedient. He drove swiftly, expertly, and impersonally, with the blank perfection of a robot. Neither Julian nor Adam had the slightest idea what he looked like.

The three friends sat in the wide back seat, with Alfred hunched up frailly in the middle. They looked very comfortable. The motion of the car was lulling, and they seemed peacefully glad to be together. With their familiarity it was not necessary to fumble for understanding or protect themselves from one another by studied concealments; and they could receive insults or tactless inquiries without the ordinary resentment required by pride.

It was almost five o'clock now, for they had made a late start from Alfred's apartment. Once the plan had been decided upon, Julian himself had seemed in no hurry to go. They had made a large, leisurely breakfast.

Julian had continued drinking. But though he had kept the bottle of Alfred's excellent Scotch whiskey always at his elbow, he had drunk cautiously. He had eyed it with a frown whenever he had poured a scant, measured amount into his glass and thinned this out generously with charged water. Shaved and bathed, he had lounged, indolently graceful, at the breakfast table with the assurance of someone who, at every stage of life, has provoked an easy admiration with his good looks. His dissipated, battered face seemed at moments almost good-looking still. The pointless noisiness had dropped away from him again for an interlude, and his voice had become once more low, resonant, and pleasing.

Filled with omelet, with hot biscuits, and with bacon too good not to have come from a superior black market, they

had sat around the table a long while, sending back for a fresh pot of coffee not once but several times.

They had talked casually as they dawdled, exchanging bits of lively information about themselves or describing flattering incidents that had happened to them. They listened to one another with tolerant, understanding smiles, for these stories were illuminated by their penetrating knowledge of one another's character. The account of the dissolution of his marriage for no ordinary reason, and his abrupt withdrawal after so many years from his church, had fallen upon Adam's own ears, as he spoke of them, with ghostly strangeness. He could not have talked of these things, perhaps, to anyone else, or at least not in the same rational way. But soon he had felt he had nothing left to say. Julian, however, to whom so much more had certainly happened, had even less to contribute. But it was clear that this did not spring from any form of reticence so much as from the fact that he appeared actually to have forgotten, as though the most violent occurrences had invariably left no impression whatever upon him.

But when both had fallen silent, Alfred began to talk of his illness again. He had already exhausted the topic, and now started to repeat himself. Saying that he was in pain nearly all of the time, he made it understandable why he should be dominated by this single concern. Nevertheless, it was difficult to listen steadily to his curiously excited voice, which seemed so lifeless upon all other topics but was raised in a rasp of exasperated yet fascinated interest on this.

One way or another it was several hours more before they stirred themselves. It was striking, now that they were together, to remark how each moved without bounce or physical impetuosity, but instead with foresight and thriftily expended energies. And this was the more noticeable because of their pretense that among themselves they were three young men again. Almost they played up this show of juvenility, even Zacharias, for one another's benefit. When they had at last descended to the waiting car, it was with

the certainty that all their comforts were assured and all mishaps guarded against. Alfred had carried in his hand a fitted physician's bag. It looked heavy and was doubtless full. Julian's light coat bulged at the sides like a pack mule, with two more bottles of Scotch which he had coolly abstracted from Alfred's cellarette. Adam had counted his money to see if he had enough with him for any ordinary contingencies.

The trip, too, had proved an easy one. Adam was surprised that he himself should feel no sense of exhaustion after being up all the night before. Rather, he felt paradoxically rested. He listened with half an ear to Zacharias on his right hand. On the other side, Julian seemed perfectly content to entertain himself. He took a pull now and then from the bottle he had already opened. He was thus no longer able to gauge the amount of these awkward swiggings.

The chauffeur had stopped a short while back to ask directions from a man loafing at the curb. He seemed satisfied about where he was as he now bowled them along. The Connecticut city had thinned out behind them, and they were rolling on a fine highway through open country with only a house showing up intermittently here and there. All at once, before any of them was prepared for it, the car slowed down beside a long, high wall overgrown with ivy. This ended in heavy stone pillars which flanked a huge gate. The words "Five Elms" were superimposed upon this in heavy brass letters. The car swung in through the driveway.

Zacharias all at once ceased talking, and Julian shoved his bottle back in his pocket. Silently and curiously, they all stared out.

The grounds were extensive, almost the size of a small English park. The lawns of still-green grass seemed to have been painstakingly tended. Several men even now could be observed working about with rollers or power-driven mowing machines. This was a place that was evidently kept up carefully and at much cost. The driveway curved and they came into view of the house itself, standing behind five

magnificent elm trees. There were a number of shrubs planted near. It was an enormous place for a private dwelling, judged by any modern standards. Yet even if it happened to be that no longer, it had certainly been that once. Someone who had become rich in the days when the acquisition of vast personal fortunes was nearly a commonplace had long ago built himself this huge, many-roomed house with its wings and turrets and gingerbread decorations. It spoke of the pathetic human illusion of permanence, along with the ironic probability that it had doubtless scarcely been built and furnished before its owner had died, his family had been disbanded, and it had been flung unwanted upon the market.

As they drew nearer, the three friends saw, too, that this great house had been remodelled, perhaps only recently. It had the oddity of possessing five sides, and the paint and workmanship on one wing was fresher than the others. A large stable had been converted into a garage, and a station-wagon and several other cars could be seen through its opened doorways. This must be an institution of some kind, they at once thought, probably an exclusive, immensely expensive sanitarium where Giles was doubtless employed as one of several resident physicians.

Their car drew up before the door. They got out in a body and climbed the steps to a wide veranda and rang the bell. A maid answered it. She was quite pretty, but with round, extraordinarily timid eyes.

"Dr. Giles live here?" said Julian.

She started, said, "Oh!" without understandable significance, and then held the door open for them. She showed them into a kind of reception room at one side and asked them to wait for a moment, sidling out with her alarmed look. Dangling from the ceiling there was a huge French chandelier that must have cost a pretty penny once. All the other furnishings, however, were blatantly modernistic. Angles and curves set off each other at every turn, and polished chromium gleamed silkily among pastel tints.

"Well, for Christ's sake!" said Julian thickly. He took another solitary drink from his bottle. Adam and Zacharias said nothing, but their expressions, too, looked puzzled.

Suddenly there was a rustle at the door, and an enormous woman confronted them. A long, white robe descended from her ample shoulders and over her immense bosom. She seemed to be nearly six feet tall. In her great florid face her child's mouth was absurdly tiny. She looked like a travesty on the popular idea of some ancient priestess or oracular poetess. She fingered a long string of varicoloured beads that descended on either side of her double chin to her girdled stomach, as she sent them a sweet, rather simpering smile.

Adam was the first to recover himself.

"Is Dr. Giles employed here?" he inquired.

The vast poetess laughed gently. "Employed?" she repeated, as if there were something delicious in this suggestion. "Well, hardly that! We have no employees here. We are all servants of the Kabalah. This is my home, however, which the Teacher honours with his presence."

"The Teacher?" Julian said loudly. "You don't mean old Giles?"

She did not answer except with her faint patronizing simper.

"We'd like to see him," said Zacharias impatiently. "We're old friends of his."

The poetess shook her head. "Right now he is undergoing one of his wonderful fasts. He is not expected to end it until nine o'clock this evening."

"Fasts?" echoed Adam stupidly. "What is he fasting for?"

"To achieve contact with the Mahatmas—the seven great masters in Thibet," she willingly explained. "Every month he undergoes it, three days before the full moon and three days afterward."

At this moment there silently entered the room together a young man and a child. The young man was bald, but the remarkable fact about him was his costume. Although

his clothes were cut in the ordinary fashion, they were of a peculiar cerulean hue that made them as startling as fancy dress. His tie, even his socks, had the same palely luminous colour. The child with him, a boy of about seven, possessed eyes so large as to seem unearthly. Richly dressed also, he nevertheless had a thin, undernourished look. These two newcomers gazed silently, earnestly, but on the whole with rather amiable expressions at the intruders.

Zacharias, taking his keen eyes from them after a moment, now quietly demanded:

"Well, can't we see Dr. Giles at all? We've come a long way—and besides his mother sent me."

The poetess considered. "You may wait right here if you like, or else come back later."

"Well, will you just tell him we're here, meanwhile?"

"I wouldn't dream of disturbing him in his period of receptivity. He is now in purified communication. We are all expecting some wonderful truths from him when he returns to descend to the fourth plane. You are adepts of Karma, I presume, since you are friends of his?" Zacharias stared at her. Then he looked grimly at his watch.

"We might as well wait," he said irritably to no one. "That's all we can do, apparently!"

The poetess inclined her head and noiselessly left them, followed by the young man and the child.

"Do you know what I think?" said Julian the moment they were alone. "We're in a high-class loony bin, that's what!"

"It's just a cult," said Zacharias. "I know about these things. And it's exactly like Giles—I knew he'd come to this! I can't even say I'm surprised."

Julian exclaimed contemptuously. "Hell, I'm not going to wait like this for three hours to please a bunch of nuts!"

"What else can you do?" Zacharias asked. "You can't break his door down!"

"Like to see me? Come along!"

He got up at once and sauntered to the door with a

childish swagger. Alfred and Adam followed him. They now, indeed, suggested by their incongruous behaviour three sportive young men with aged faces. Julian, gazing all around the empty hallway, next began to make his way up the stairs with a kind of consciously exaggerated stealthiness. On the landing he paused and beckoned them. The others reached his side. There was nothing to be seen but a number of doors along a wide, handsome hall, and all of them were shut. At that moment one of them at the far end opened, and the timid maid who had first let them in here came out. She walked forward rapidly without noticing them at first. Passing one door in particular, she suddenly began to walk on tiptoe. The next moment her eyes fell upon the three men staring ridiculously at her. She clearly repressed an outcry, perhaps even a shriek.

Julian, paying no attention to her, seemed to make up his mind at once. He marched directly to the door past which she had stepped so reverently, and pulled it open. Looking inside, he gave an elated yell.

"Hello, newsboy!" he cried. "And what papers are you peddling these days?"

Adam and Zacharias now followed him, Zacharias taking the precaution to close the door as he entered. The room itself was bare as a cell. On a stand there stood a grotesque, highly geometrical portrait of a bearded man that seemed to have been executed in painted glass. A red sword penetrated this upward, evenly dividing the beard and the huge eyes. This strange device was apparently connected with an electric wall socket, for an alternating current was now sending floods of light through it, rippling and fading in a monotonous stream.

And in a straight, hard-backed chair which gave him a full view of it, Will Giles was now sitting. He was wearing a coat of some soft stuff that hung about his shoulders as loosely as a cape. An old-fashioned Windsor tie of white silk was fastened about his throat, and on his feet were a pair of leather sandals.

His face itself was bloodlessly pale. The skin seemed almost translucent. Yet the expression of his eyes was mild and happy. He gently smiled upon them, seeming in no way upset by their unheralded appearance. But as he so peacefully gazed towards them, without the slightest show of surprise, he nevertheless struck them all as perfectly sane, in spite of his grotesque apparel and the paraphernalia with which he was surrounded. So it seemed quite natural for Julian to burst out noisily:

"Well, for Christ's sake, it's you all right! For a moment I was afraid you'd gone nuts, too!"

Giles laughed weakly but pleasantly. That sound, also, was reassuring. His voice, as he spoke, was incredibly faint, as if it came from far away.

"Well, well, I'm very glad to see all of you."

"But what is this joint all about?" Julian demanded. "And what the hell are you doing in it?"

Giles smiled at him with ineffable benevolence. He spoke rather humbly but without embarrassment.

"I've been meditating . . . on the supra-essential way."

"On the what?"

Giles only continued to beam on him. Adam observed mildly:

"You hardly seem surprised at seeing us, Will!"

"No; I was expecting you," Giles answered calmly. "Only yesterday, while I was concentrating, you came into my vision as if you had been summoned by the Masters. Probably you have been sent here for some purpose that is not given us to understand yet."

They stared at him uneasily. An awkward silence fell.

"The only purpose we came here for," said Zacharias at last in a harsh voice, "was to look you up. You see, your mother wrote me and asked me to do that some while ago."

For the first time, over Giles' placid, gentle face there passed a faint cloud.

"She'll have to learn for herself," he murmured. "The way is long. But no help can come from outside. It will be

hard for her—she must pass through many lives yet.”

Julian, who had been gaping, now emitted a loud, disgusted sound.

“Do you actually know what you’re saying?” he cried. “Or are you just trying to kid us? All we came up here for is to get you to keep that date you made with us—to eat in that same joint we were in the night before we went out on the *K-13*.”

Giles regarded him gravely. His voice, however, became more colloquial, and his accent sounded more familiar.

“I can’t, Julian. I never go anywhere any more—physically, that is. But I can send my astral self along with you, if you like, and it’ll be just the same as if I was there, too.”

“Astral self, hell!” said Julian violently, as if he had made up his mind to put up with this no longer. “You can talk like that to this rich old fool who’s running this mad-house if you want, but not to me you can’t! Get up, you bastard, or I’ll clout you!”

He caught Giles by the collar as he spoke, and with unexpected strength hauled him to his feet as lightly as a doll. Then, taking a firm grip on Will’s arm, he began to drag him forward disrespectfully.

“Listen, Julian, I really can’t,” Giles protested, yet without seeming in any way indignant. “You see——”

“Come on!” said Julian in a voice at once rough and good-humoured. “You can tell us all about it when you get there!”

Adam and Zacharias, not altogether easy in their minds, could do nothing but follow, and the little procession, with Giles still feebly and uselessly protesting, made its way down the stair.

But when they had reached the lower hall they saw that half a dozen people had by this time gathered there to intercept them. Their faces were angry and menacing. The huge poetess towered among them.

“How dare you!” she cried in a now thoroughly aroused

and sensible voice. "Let him go immediately, before I send for the police! Otto, telephone for them!"

But Giles made an absurd gesture with his free arm that had something of the pretentiousness of a benediction.

"No, no, Elfreda!" he pleaded in his weak, tired voice. "You must do nothing at all. You must submit always. Submission has been ordered by the Masters. Only so can mind be blended with spirit."

They stood aside then, though their faces remained indignant and reluctant. Julian got Giles through the door. Adam and Zacharias sneaked behind, looking ridiculous and guilty. They all clambered hastily into the car, Julian never relinquishing his hold on Will until they were outside.

"Now," he said with overwhelming satisfaction, "we'll go and have that little dinner—the one we planned!"

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

"THIS IS THE place!" cried Adam with an eagerness that first astonished and then embarrassed him. "I know it is!"

The car had crawled slowly along various ill-lit streets in abruptly altered directions. Different vistas had sprung up, full of a dream-like familiarity, yet these seemed disconnected and uncertain in relationship, like the scattered pieces of a once-solved jigsaw puzzle.

And it was the more difficult to be sure just where they were because, with the coming of dark, a cold, windless, Autumn rain had begun to fall. Hadn't the weather been the same when they had last been here—half a lifetime ago? Adam, who asked this question of himself, could not accurately remember. But it seemed altogether fitting that the gloomy windows of drugstores should be thus obscured in a wet haze; that all the lampposts should drip with monotonous steadiness and reveal beneath them glistening puddles in the depressions; and that the night should everywhere about be silent, lonely, and dark.

As the car had sidled down this last street near the waterfront, all four of them had, indeed, peered out anxiously and determinedly, even Giles ceasing from the drone of gentle, almost incomprehensible talk which had flowed from him as softly as breath on the entire way here. In the need to be interested in their purpose, the longing to believe that what they pursued mattered, they, too, had had to fall back upon the eternal expedient of thinking solely in terms of obstacles. Nevertheless, now that they were here—for not one of them disputed Adam's cry of recognition—they did not immediately experience that disillusioned weariness which is the reward of all aims not worth attaining. Perhaps they were buoyed up still by a little last curiosity.

They got out in a body and made quite a defiant noise about going inside. They were then greatly surprised. For the place itself was exactly the same, as if time had elected to stop there. It was not merely that this was the same location at which they had eaten and drunk on that long-ago night, innocently excited by hopes, imaginings, and speculations about an allotment of the future that was so generous that it had then seemed downright inexhaustible; it was that the actual restaurant had not apparently changed in the slightest particular. It remained ironically unaltered, as if to inform them thus how long a way they themselves had come, how soon that allotment had been exhausted, and how badly it had been filled.

Yes, the big, square room was the same, with the same dimly remembered bareness and unscrubbed dinginess, and the paint here and there peeling from the walls in the same places, just as if these inanimate things had been quietly waiting from some obscure duty for nothing but their inevitable return.

And at that moment the Greek proprietor advanced to shunt them off to a table, and with final surprise Adam Mallory realized that he, too, was the same man. His hair, it was true, had now become a dirty white, and his eyes had the watery mildness of age. Yet there he was, scarcely

different in expression, and somehow perfectly recognizable. What countless greasy dinners he must have served in his tawdry eating place during the more than twenty-five years that had elapsed! How many dim people he had seen come and go! How had he borne that, even though sustained by the necessity of living himself and protected by the most comatose deficiency of imagination?

Adam was then glad to perceive that he was not the only one who had recognized him. Julian either did, also, or else convincingly assumed that this must be the same man, as became someone who expected that everything and everyone should quite properly await his convenience with submissiveness, even for twenty-five or more years.

"Hello, you old bastard!" he exclaimed affably. "Don't you remember us? We're getting to be regular customers, by God!"

He slung his coat carelessly over a rack, the uncentered peg giving it a lopsided, intoxicated aspect as though his clothing were a symbol or part of his contempt for the illusions of purpose and order.

The Greek proprietor, exposing a solitary, tartarous tooth like a badly placed fang, gave them a peasant's smile and mumbled some answer or other which made it clear that he, at any rate, had no recollection whatsoever of them. But though the words themselves were almost inaudible, chiefly because they were successfully competed with by a radio that was now blaring away with the violence of idiocy on a shelf across the room—the only actually new feature in the whole place—it was clear also that in the space of twenty-five years the proprietor's broken English had not changed either. So it was that the past now seemed to advance half-way to meet their sentimental return to it.

Sitting down with a clatter, they all looked about instantly with the atavistic reconnaissance for mates or enemies. Even Giles peered thus with his mild, unfocusing eyes that held so pure an expression. There were as few people here tonight as there had been on the evening long ago. Perhaps the rain

had kept most customers away; or, more likely, an eating house so candidly squalid had never at any time been very popular. A couple of local fishermen were filling themselves in loutish muteness at the nearest table. Across the room were a few lower-middle-class couples, the men with vacant or brutish faces; the women achieving a kind of special, respectable ugliness, as though this were something that they had had to struggle hard to acquire. All the other patrons were young men in uniform, and most of these were sailors, wearing various ratings of the newer submarine service.

But none of these last groups was in any way analogous to what the four aging men had themselves once been. Adam gazed about as if searching wistfully for some repetition of their own pattern. But such as were here, at any rate, did not strike him as very interesting youths. And there was something in their faces, besides, that had not been in the faces of the young men of the war of the previous generation. They were more serious, that was it, with a profound resentment controlled only by stoicism, as if, with their best years being pilfered from them, they well knew it. They did not look as if they were likely to be satisfied with words either, all the repellent bathos, the warlike fervour of a chest-thumping civilian population. In his day, he remembered, he and his friends had drunk toasts of bravado to the Kaiser, out of sheer repugnance to all that. Had these new young men drunk similar toasts to Hitler or the Mikado? Probably not; they looked too mature, and far too embittered, for such callow cheerfulness.

The proprietor had wandered off, but now came shuffling back with some stained menus clamped together in his grimy lump of a fist. He was still smiling, with a kind of automatic cunning, about nothing.

Except for Giles, lost in some thoughts of his own, they examined the menus with pessimistic frowns. Alfred Zacharias delicately shuddered. He put his down and pushed it quickly away from him.

"Look here," he said uneasily, "let's get out of this place

and go up to the hotel. That will be bad enough, God knows, but at least——”

“We’re eating right here,” said Julian doggedly. “That’s what we came for, isn’t it? And what’s the matter with this joint anyway, I’d like to know!” He dropped his own menu and glanced up at the proprietor. “What have you got tonight that’s good? How about a steak?”

“Gotta nice stew,” said the Greek. “Nice Hungarian stew.”

“All right,” said Julian heartily. “And bring me a double order. I’m hungry.”

Adam said he would have some, too. Zacharias, with an affronted expression, ordered only a couple of soft-boiled eggs. Taking out the medicine bag which he had carefully brought into the restaurant with him, he now began to mix a dose of several ingredients with concentrated earnestness. Giles, picking up the menu for the first time and studying it for so long that they all presently fidgeted, declared at last that he would like a small dish of boiled peas.

“For Christ’s sake, is that all you’re going to eat?” Julian burst out in protest.

Giles answered he never ate more at any one meal. Besides, since he was just breaking a fast, it was necessary to begin sparingly, and so this was almost too much. A spoonful or two of milk would really have been sufficient.

“But, hell, you’ve got to have a couple of chops to go with them!” Julian insisted.

Giles shook his head, saying gravely: “I haven’t eaten meat for five years.”

“Why not?”

“The animal always knows it is going to be killed twenty-four hours beforehand,” Giles explained in his curiously soft, benign voice. “That makes it very sad. And then this sadness enters the people who eat it. It’s just as simple as all that.”

“Well, for God’s sake!” Julian cried disgustedly. “Why, you haven’t even got enough brains to get sad with!”

Giles only laughed gently. There was a beaming look

about him like someone who accepts the innocent teasings of a child.

While they had been arguing thus, the Greek proprietor had gathered up his soiled menus and disappeared into the kitchen. A silence fell. For the first time the realization that they were all actually together, and really here, came home to them with bleak comprehension. There were now neither obstacles nor curiosities to sustain them. The evening stretched ahead blank, pointless, laborious and desperately dreary. They did not truly have anything to say to one another, for the bitter fact was that they were not interested. All the meticulous conjunction of circumstances which had brought this meeting about, the happening of Adam's encounter with Julian, the coincidence of the latter's drunken caprice with Alfred's guilty sense of a neglected obligation, the blunt forcing of Giles, seemed elaborately mathematical for a result so inane. What on earth were they really here for? What on earth could they possibly do?

As if aware of this dismal outcome of all his challenge and flamboyance, Julian reached for the only solace he any longer trusted. His hand dove hurriedly into the pocket of his dangling coat and brought out the bottle of whiskey from which he had been swigging at intervals during the drive up from New York. He set it down on the table with a kind of menacing thump.

"Let's have a drink!" he said almost belligerently. At once he began to pour out generous portions of the spirits into the thick tumblers around him.

Giles shook his head again. "None for me, thank you, Julian."

"Listen!" said Julian savagely. "You can starve yourself to death if you want to, but, by God, you're going to drink with us whether you like it or not!"

Giles exhibited his meek, placating smile. This, and the amused comprehension in his eyes, seemed to lend to his incoherent words a kind of extra wildness, as if he were all the time perpetrating some stupid hoax. Yet it was clear

also that he was perfectly sincere, so sincere that he did not need to defend his opinions with rancour.

And rambling along in his irrelevant, dreamy way, he declared that liquor in any amount could not possibly affect him, and described the mystic breathing exercises by which this immunity had been attained.

"Well, if it doesn't affect you," Julian broke in scornfully, "what are you so scared about then?"

"I'm not scared, Julian. It just doesn't mean anything to me one way or the other. You see, even a neophyte——"

"Then drink up with the rest of us!"

Giles met his cynical eye with a half-compassionate look.

"If you really want me to that much, I will."

Julian clinked his glass all around, and they downed the unwatered whiskey together. And strangely, Giles, alone of them all, seemed to swallow his without effort or faint signs of repulsion.

"Ah," said Julian, relaxing gratefully the moment afterward, "that's better, that's better right away! I needed that drink!"

Immediately, as if he feared his flooding relief might somehow escape from him, he clawed the glasses together again and poured out a fresh round. The rest watched him with serious expressions. Adam, too, felt the spirits warming and softening him. He began to feel glad, after all, that he was here like this. He gazed with affectionate understanding at the others.

"Well, we've really kept our promise," he said slowly. "I remember we were very earnest about it that night. But just what happened? We'd left the *K-13* and were ashore on liberty, I know. But what did we do after that?"

"We bought some booze, of course," Julian asserted. "Some bootlegger somewhere."

"You swiped it," Zacharias corrected sharply.

"O.K. I swiped it."

"And then we went to see that girl," Adam continued. "She was a friend of yours, Zach."

Their tongues, loosened by the whiskey, except for Giles', began to clack at once and with revived animation, as though they were suddenly young men again.

"Her old man was going to shot us. Why was that?"

"Adam burned her. He dropped a cigarette on her."

"Yes, I did, I remember I did. It was awful! What do you suppose ever happened to her?"

"Taking in washing probably, if she's alive. She was just a lousy little tramp."

"It was right afterwards that we came over to this place. We got some wine—a lot of wine."

"We stayed up all night here—I know that, anyway!"

"And then they rounded us up and we went on board."

Abruptly they all grew silent, with averted, reflective faces, engrossed by those later recollections for which even now they could find no intelligible words: the impression of vast blackness in the steel trap which had rocked helplessly from side to side like a dying fish, as it carried them all to the bottom, and thereafter the slow, unfolding horror. Only Giles seemed remote from these considerations with his lucent, transfixed gaze. The others lifted their eyes at last and looked at each other furtively. No one spoke for a moment.

Then Julian said with a shaky laugh that was nevertheless shot out with violence:

"Well, anyway, here we are still, so here's to us!"

He drank, and the rest followed. Adam ruminatively scrutinized the other three, thinking of himself also.

Before him was conjured up that painful contrast between the remembered past and the living present which is the emotional measurement of time. How different they had all once been! What a shocking index of failure and decay they now offered! And yet, upon someone who had not known them then, surely they would have made no discreditable impression!

On the contrary: these four men, seemingly grouped together only by the accelerating descent of their fifties, had

on the whole as estimable an appearance as most people, far better than most people. They looked seasoned, aware, and even, in a material way, more or less prosperous. They were well enough dressed certainly. Alfred's clothes were even glossily expensive. Even Giles, in spite of the pronounced oddity of his costume, and Julian, for all his chaotic untidiness, were at least not down-at-heel.

And beyond all that, they bore the traces of individual distinction: there was an impressive look of rich experience about each of them. And why should this not be so? There sat Zacharias, hawk-like and keen, assuredly envied by many persons, in spite of his now wretched health, for his wealth and the notable mark he had made in his difficult and colourful occupation. Would not he himself have gloated excitedly years ago had he been vouchsafed a glimpse of this authentic success which had awaited him?

Julian, for his part, was actually famous. Why, everyone knew who Julian Gamble was! And throughout his life he had enjoyed over and over all those things which are thought to be the most rare, the most desirable. He had lived with pleasure in the midst of lavishness, in beautiful houses with beautiful women, and with every whim unhesitatingly gratified. Large sums of money had been poured into his hands almost for the asking. He had never known any of those wearing troubles, petty exactions and mean denials that fill even the crevices of most ordinary lives. He had lived always, as the saying is, like a prince. He was still, even now, relieved from care and absolved from discipline.

Giles, also, so patient, forbearing, and noble-seeming, carried upon his pure, delicate-skinned face the stamp of his impressive self-development. He had become as much of a saint, perhaps, as it is possible for a man to be, even at the price of being a fool. All human malevolence had been drained from his pale eyes, now filled only with an incomparable and irresistible sweetness. He was not competing with anyone, those eyes said, not seeking to elevate himself at the expense of anyone; and he longed neither to rebuke

nor to reform anyone, but only to have everyone make himself happy. In his strange goodness he had become almost great.

For his own part, Adam supposed that his haggard appearance was at least that of a thoughtful and searching man who was not in any ordinary difficulty. Yes, each of them here was nearly one among a thousand. Very few at their age looked as lucky. A casual observer would undoubtedly have concluded most of these flattering things from a single glance at them.

Yet, how far those conclusions were from the truth! For the truth, attested by the inexorable witness of their past, was instead that they had alike fallen in to an abysmal deterioration. It was not the mere inevitable deterioration of fading physical vitality or their now scarcely traceable good looks. It had nothing to do with Zacharias' betraying paunch, or Julian Gamble's lined and coarsened face, or Giles' emaciated weakness, or Adam's worn and aging air: such things did not matter; they were but records of the lost attributes of the time of love, which certainly no man of any account and in his right senses desired to last forever.

The evil and the self-injury lay deeper than that, deeper than the simple loss of that joy which they had once received from their strongly pounding blood, from their abundant gusto, and from all the warm delight they had taken in their supple and resilient bodies.

For the clear fact was that they had been devastatingly defeated by life, and their faces and words were only masks over the evidences of an unutterable disintegration. The promise that they had held out to others, that they had held out to themselves, in the pride of their youth, had long ago receded in the indecipherable distance, an illusion that had touched fulfilment only for an ironic instant in its own affirmation of aspiration and confidence. Those audacities were now all gone; they had no longer any hope. One by one they had given up: Giles, wrapped in the grandeur of his insane dream, apparently the sacred prophet of his idiot

cult; Julian in his stale debauchery; Alfred in his loneliness and selfish monomania; Adam in his bitter futility. All of them were old, self-cheated, frustrated, and broken; and for none of them was there anything ahead.

Yet was not that everywhere the common fate? Was not a similar deterioration to be surmised beneath the aging masks not only of the beaten and the obscure, but of the most eminent, the most admired, and even the most austere men? Did not the same duplicities and the same self-betrays show through everywhere, together with the same abject compromises and craven abandonments? Had not they, too, betrayed their single moment of purity, the exalted promise of their youth?

Here, at any rate, these four now sat drinking together, not to express a gaiety they could no longer achieve, but rather as if attempting to hold at bay the unhappy desperation that had been summoned up by their reunion.

Julian had pulled out the other bottle which he had purloined that morning from Alfred's apartment. He snipped off the foil with a tableknife and poured out more drinks all around as if with the determination of carrying them along with him into a drunkenness he himself would not escape.

Alfred's face was already somewhat flushed. Yet in spite of his heightened colour, he looked sicker than before. Adam's thoughts veered irrelevantly, and he was beginning to be moved by a consciousness of his own expanded emotions. Only Giles looked exactly the same, pale, tenderly sorrowful, and exquisitely unsullied.

Some time before, the Greek had arrived with the food, but Julian, after a single mouthful, had pushed his plate away. His eyes now stared all about him with a glazed fixity that was unsettling. For he was now, himself, quite savagely drunk. It had happened all at once in the space of the last few minutes, as if all the alcohol he had swallowed in the past twenty-four hours had finally accumulated with sufficient force to overwhelm him. From this condition there

would certainly be no more miraculous returns without the interval of sleep. Moreover, he had grown all at once unaccountably angry at them all. His face looked surly and brutal.

His voice, whenever he spoke, had become so laboriously and pretentiously suave as to sound like a kind of demented snarl. And his intention from now on to attack, to wound as much as possible and to be entirely ruthless, seemed to grow visibly.

After they had all finished eating, his malign glare returned to Giles several times, and at last settled on him with unswerving contempt. In the past few minutes, Zacharias had begun talking to Will in a half-confidential undertone, doubtless trying to find out how things really stood with him, and so decide what he would reluctantly have to do to assist him. Giles' unheard answers, drowned out by the radio, however, only seemed to be exasperating him, so that Alfred's expression grew more and more disgusted. It looked as if he had already, with practical sense and doubtless much relief, half made up his mind that there was nothing to be done and he could wash his hands of the whole matter.

"What the hell are you two yammering about?" Julian suddenly demanded. "Speak up and let the rest of us in on it!"

Still mysteriously unaffected by the drinks he had swallowed at Julian's cynical insistence, Giles now made his folly more blatant by the absense of any excuse for it.

"I've been trying to explain something to Alfred," he said eagerly, but with his humble air. "Of course, we each have to find out for ourselves. That is why we return to life so many times in so many forms before we are ready for knowledge. We have to learn that reality is not what we see with our eyes on the lower planes; it is only the things we are yet unable to see. The seven Masters now, in the Himalayas, are steadily watching all of us, just waiting for the time when they can communicate their beautiful thoughts

to us. But before they do, we first have to get rid of all our material desires."

Zacharias gnawed his lip impatiently, and Adam glanced down uncomfortably. It struck him that Will, with his gabble of half-baked mysticism, could no longer really be considered quite sane. Only Julian continued to confront him mercilessly.

"The whole trouble with you, Giles," he said loudly, "is that all you give a damn about is money."

The brutal bluntness of this accusation, with all its implications of miserable failure and cowardly self-deception, made Adam wince, while Alfred's hands involuntarily closed in a self-protective gesture. Only Giles himself appeared completely untouched. He made no answer, but his benign smile enveloped Julian with a kind of fatherly solicitude. Perhaps he did not hear anything any more that he did not wish to; he had indeed escaped the reality he denied.

As of worsted by an armour of delusion so deep that he could not ever penetrate it, Julian merely snorted his disdain and helped himself recklessly to another drink. His reddened, ungracious eyes circled the table in quest of easier victims. With a sudden plunge he fell upon Zacharias.

"And what plane are you on, Comrade?" he inquired in a stupidly insulting voice.

Alfred remained perfectly cool and equable, as if he had been expecting this for some time and had prepared himself for it. His eyes took in Julian's measure with an equally contemptuous summary.

"On the sober plane, drunk," he said in a level but jeering voice.

Julian guffawed senselessly. "Hell, you're on the Jewish plane, of course!"

"Ah," said Zacharias genially, "and you seem to be on the anti-Semitic one, along with the rest of the crackpots and psychotics. That's it, isn't it?"

Julian nodded vigorously. "Yeah, along with about ninety million of 'em in this country alone." He banged his fist on

the table. "Why, you Jews don't even know yet what anti-Semitism is about. You can't seem to get it through your thick heads."

"Really?" said Alfred. "Then it would be interesting to learn." He assumed a smile of sarcastic, goading invitation.

"Wait a minute!" Adam broke in anxiously. "Let's stop all this! Julian, you started it—what's the sense anyway?"

Giles chimed in pleadingly: "If you would only meditate for ten minutes in silence, while repeating the word *oom*, you would see——"

But neither Julian nor Alfred glanced in their direction or even seemed to know they had spoken. Julian's half-closed eyes had become a little wary, but it was certain that he was now determined to bring about a disgraceful quarrel.

"You wouldn't understand if I were to tell you," he said with childish loftiness. "But you're all the same, every damn one of you! Just look at this war—all the Jews screaming bloody murder against the Germans, and why? Because the Germans are at war with this country? Good God, the Jews don't mind that—they don't mind the Japs, of course. They hate the Germans only because the Germans are at war with the Jews. Why, if that wasn't so, all the Jews here by rights ought to be glad when one bunch of Germans who happen to be Christians kill another bunch of Germans who happen to be Jews. But, hell, Jews never belong to any country, they just live in it."

Zacharias pursed up his lips. He was as self-controlled as ever, but a weary detestation filled his eyes.

"Oh," he said. "That old argument! I thought I was going to hear something new! I feel a little ashamed of myself for even imagining you'd have something to say."

His scornful, even voice carried a peculiar authority. Julian emitted another blatant laugh that laid claim to a victory which he smartingly realized he had not won.

"Give me a drink!" he exclaimed furiously, and spilling some more whiskey into his glass, immediately downed it. Grasping the table, his hand this time missed it and he all

but fell. "Christ!" he muttered. With an effort he straightened himself up and jutted his jaw out.

"Now listen," he began again in a loud, bullying accent. "I'll give it to you straight—tell you in ten feet what it's all about——"

"I've heard enough," said Zacharias curtly. Suddenly he swallowed a pill, which he seemed to have been holding secretly for some time in his fingers. "You're drunk to begin with. So shut up! I'm not well enough to get into the brawl you're evidently begging for."

"Not well enough?" cried Julian ferociously. "Hell, you're well enough if you want to be! There's nothing the matter with you, Zacharias, except being half dead with fright."

Zacharias did not answer. But something in his tense rigidity suggested that this accusation had strangely succeeded in upsetting him, where the grosser attack on his race had failed.

The crafty perceptiveness of the drunkard seemed to apprise Julian of this also. He chuckled vindictively and elaborated his hit.

"You and your illness, for Christ's sake! It's probably the only thing that's keeping you alive—you'll nurse your fake disease along until you're ninety—that's the one pleasure you've got left!"

Up till this moment Zacharias had comported himself with admirable dignity, but now, to Adam's dismay, he went all at once to pieces, exposing himself almost as odiously as Julian. And there came from him, like an echo across time, the remembered sound of low, furious gutturals, from which every evidence of cultivation had vanished.

"Yah!" he spluttered. "You bum—you drunken loafer! You drunken bum, you!"

He brandished his fist hysterically, waving it in an expression of emotion rather than with any actual intention of using it. But the threat was all that Julian required. Like lightning he seemed for the briefest of instants to be restored to sobriety, as he swung his arm back. Adam called out an

alarmed warning, but it was Will Giles who tried actually to do something.

"Julian!" he exclaimed in entreaty and, scrambling up, attempted to interpose himself in time. He succeeded. Julian's fist, shooting out with ample force, caught Giles squarely on the mouth and knocked him backward to the floor in his chair with a tremendous crash.

In the tawdry restaurant an appalled silence fell. Julian was breathing hard. He began to laugh with a kind of weak braggadocio. Getting up, he started off with ponderous dignity, yet without seeming to know where he was going. He staggered and dropped down before an empty table across the room. He lowered his head on the cloth and collapsed there.

Adam and Zacharias, with sick faces, had meanwhile stooped over Giles and lifted him to his feet. They got him back into his chair. Blood was trickling slowly from his swelling mouth. With his already puffy, distorted lips he was still endeavouring to smile.

The few other patrons in the place were gaping toward them. One or two grinned stupidly. Adam began to try to mop the blood from Will's face with a napkin. Alfred supported his shoulders. Just then the Greek proprietor came out of the kitchen, followed by a tall, rather ugly woman, who was clearly his daughter.

"I want you should pay and get out!" shouted the Greek. "I don't want no more trouble here. Here is your check, now just pay and get the hell!"

But his daughter, evidently more kindly, stopped him, saying something in his ear, and then bent over Giles to see if he were badly hurt. A fragmentary memory crossed Adam's mind even in this chaotic moment: of Giles long ago in this same place writing a prescription for a squalling infant held in its mother's arms near the kitchen doors. Could this young woman be that infant now grown up, and all unguessed, returning that forgotten favour? At any rate, she was holding a glass of water to

Will's mouth, and had immediately taken complete charge.

Zacharias straightened up. He looked somberly at Adam and shook his head. "Where is he now?" he asked in a low voice.

Adam pointed. They both gazed silently at the dim figure of Julian in the shadows across the room, sprawled out upon the table in his alcoholic coma, exactly as if he had been stabbed and flung there.

"He won't last six months at the rate he's going," said Zacharias with hard satisfaction. He paused, reflecting. "I'll take Giles back to his place," he said presently in an undertone. "It's clear they treat him wonderfully there—I managed to make that out at least—oh, he's in clover! Now, do you want to come with us, or would you rather take the train from here? The train would get you in much quicker, of course, and probably be more comfortable."

Alfred's anxiety to escape from all of them, and from all reminders of this suffocating episode, was baldly plain. But Adam felt equally a desire to be alone.

"I'll take the train," he said.

Zacharias nodded. "Just give me a hand with Giles to the car." Picking up the check on the table, he added it up rapidly, yet carefully, counted out the money, and handed it to the scowling Greek. Then he stooped and reached for his fitted physician's bag. "Come along, Giles, we're going now."

Between them, Adam and Alfred got Giles up and helped him outside. He was talking again, explaining everything in a scarcely intelligible voice through his bruised lips. It was in his familiar strain of incoherent, mystical jargon.

Outside, the rain had ceased. The chauffeur sat like a piece of wood at the wheel of Alfred's big parked car. He got out with a startled look and helped, too.

"Good-bye," said Zacharias to Adam with a dismal pretence of cordiality. "Be sure and look me up some time!"

Will Giles mumbled something also, something about the Masters, it sounded. His round, serene eyes met Adam's in

a last look with the unruffled fixity of a baby. Then the door slammed on them, the chauffeur clambered in, and the car slowly turned and swayed down the wet street.

Adam stood watching until it disappeared. He frowned, thinking of Julian lying like a dead man inside the restaurant. But there was no use in going back after him—it would be impossible to rouse him now. Besides, Julian would know best how to care for himself when he came miserably to his senses again. And no one could do anything for him any more.

It had grown chilly as it cleared, and before starting out, Adam buttoned up his coat. All at once, as he stood there, he was bewildered by the realization that he actually did not know where he was bound! To his room in Columbia Heights, of course, but not for long! For without having thought about it at all, he saw that some time during the past hectic twenty-four hours he had decided to go away again. He had decided to cease setting down any further those laborious conclusions upon self-deceit whose formulation itself seemed but one more example of it.

For to what purpose could a man devote himself to an assault upon the universal human characteristic? No one had ever really converted anyone else, but only himself. And the proof of his success might well be his silence—was not that why the aged wise were so still?

At least, until self-conversion happened in turn to each, nothing that mattered much would be changed.

Yet Adam knew—he did not merely hope—that within the long trajectory of time goodness would come to pass. Life would survive its own attempt on itself; it would survive even the blasting of exterior suns.

Long before he earth disintegrated, men would colonize still other planets like a furious swarming of bees, and again and again find a new temporary security.

Now Adam felt with the calmest exhilaration that his own struggle was over; he did not need to search any more.

But what, in a literal and concrete sense, was he actually

to do henceforth—where was he to go?—if going anywhere even mattered. He felt suddenly that all he now desired was the simplest sort of natural living in some almost solitary place. And the answer came, as though that, too, had been secretly and smilingly waiting for him all along until he was ready for it.

He would go again to that obscure Caribbean island where he had once fled in his young manhood from unhappy thoughts of Louise. The mere reaching of it, of course, might be difficult in these days, but he could get to Cuba at any rate, and probably find a passage from there on some native fishing boat. He would return to that village hidden in the back of time, where he had once profoundly suffered, as if to an ineffable contentment. Yet he did not pretend to himself that he felt any pathos in his ability to feel any longer as he had felt then.

Poor Louise! And thinking of her now and her end, he recalled her strange theory that everyone who had ever lived had been an unconscious suicide, encompassing his own destruction, whether with swiftness or slowness, once the actual object of a lifetime had either been completely realized or else irrevocably abandoned.

Adam pondered. He thought it no more than an odd fancy, for although his own obscure quest had at last been realized or finally abandoned—he could not say which—he felt that he was now going to live many long and satisfying years.

Yes, he would return at once to that island, to that tiny, primitive settlement, to its enormous stillness and remoteness. The prospect began to soothe him, as if it were the peace of a monastery towards which he now turned his face.

And he had a sudden vision that rose before him with astonishing clearness, detail by sharp detail: the tropic trees, the glittering white beach, the glittering, coloured water. Then a sleek, carved shape, whose contours emulated the form of a submarine, as it balanced itself delicately in the shallows, stole softly into his mirage. What it was he could

not, in his lost musings, say; yet somehow felt no curiosity to define.

He was certain only that he would soon stand again upon the fringe of that bay. And he saw himself plunging into that beckoning water, perhaps on the very first morning he arrived, a lonely swimmer in the inscrutable solitude, out of sight of any human eye, beyond the reach of any human ear. He faintly smiled without knowing why.

Then he pulled his hat down on his forehead with a statement of purpose, and began to tramp along the empty, gleaming street in the direction of the station.

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